Those Who Stay: A Narrative Inquiry of Four English Teachers Who Continue to Teach

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1976 Florynce R. Kennedy, a United States lawyer, activist, speaker, and author famously stated that “anybody with the brains and energy to become a teacher ought to want to become something better.” With these stigmas surrounding the teaching profession, it becomes a wonder that anybody decides to become a teacher, or even more difficult, stay in the profession. The state of Arizona, specifically, has reached landmark attrition rates and dissatisfaction surrounding lack of education funding. The stories of those leaving have been well publicized over the last year, but what about those who choose to stay? This dissertation examines the counter narrative behind the teacher attrition crisis by focusing on the stories of the teachers in the secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classroom who have decided to remain in the profession. Through narrative inquiry, this study examines how teachers narrate their experiences as teachers and how those constructs may have contributed to their retention. This study collected data from four high school English teachers through two in-depth interviews, classroom observations, a self-made teacher journey concept map, and teaching artifacts in the form of a teaching experience “time capsule.” Through this data, the participants’ stories highlighting their journey to teaching, current careers, and insights on retention were re-storied then thematically coded and analyzed. Findings are in essence the stories themselves, but also reveal how these teachers narrate their career, societal impacts, quality of life, as well as what motivating factors inspire them to stay in the classroom and teach.

This work is dedicated to my husband, whom without, this document would not exist. I also dedicate this work to my children, present and future, that they might know that if their momma was able to complete this, they too, can do hard things.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to all the teachers who love their students. Please know that what you do matters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In college, I had the opportunity to intern at a local newspaper. One of my tasks was to interview and write feature articles for local authors. One such author introduced me to the idea of dreamzappers--the things that exist in our lives that tell us “we can’t.” I am immensely fortunate that in my life I have only been surrounded by dream supporters. To my committee co-chairs, Dr. James Blasingame and Dr. Sybil Durand, you are the best cheer squad a doctoral student could ask for. Dr. B, you are one of those people that there is no other--you are kind, you are selfless, you care about other people without end, and you never offered anything but positive support and assistance as I trudged through this process. Dr. Durand, you had endless faith in my abilities beyond what I knew myself to be capable of. While I merely felt like I was pretending to know what I was doing most of the time, you told me that I did.

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Dr. Chris Crowe, thank you for introducing me to a world of young adult books beyond the authors I already knew. You introduced me to Laurie Halse Anderson, Walter Dean Myers, Gene Luen Yang, Jacqueline Woodson, and countless more. Then later, you listened to me as I stumbled through my first year as an intern teacher and told me it was

okay to cry, and sometimes it was even okay to lose my cool; teaching was actually really hard. I truly didn't know until I was doing it.

To my parents. Dad, you never made me feel like I was less-capable of achieving everything I wanted in school and in a career than your two sons--which I now know, not all little girls have. You always thought I was smart and capable, so I tried to be those things to show you that you weren't wrong. Mom, thank you for driving two hours on countless occasions to watch a sick baby so I could work. Thank you for being on the other end of the phone for hours listening to my thoughts and ideas on school and work, even if I was talking about qualitative narrative inquiry methodology. There are so many things to thank you for, these pages aren't enough; I could probably write a dissertation on it.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THOSE WHO TEACH

Teachers are expected to reach unattainable goals with inadequate tools. The miracle is that at times they accomplish this impossible task.

— Haim Ginott

Narrative Beginnings

Becoming a Teacher

As long as I can remember, reading was something I just did. Piles of books every week from the Stamford, CT city library with its red marble staircases and mirrors lining the vast halls. Then in fourth grade, Miss Lichtman assigned my class to write a fictional tale from the perspective of an explorer. Don't ask me why, but my nine-year-old self became more connected with the emotions and conquests of Balboa than it ever had with a Polly Pocket or a TY Beanie Baby; I discovered that I loved to write.

These two passions carried me all the way through middle school, AP English in high school, and to a declared English major in college. However, on the way, one more teacher made a pit stop in the significant moments that led me to my career. In eighth grade, Mr. Elias--the jovial band teacher and school's jack of all trades-- sat next to me on the auditorium stage after a school musical rehearsal.

"So, Mandy," he began, our legs swinging in syncopated motion over the ledge of the Cloonan Middle School wooden stage. "What do you want to do when you grow up?"

The question.

"Me?" What did I want to do? I spewed off occupations that I knew: lawyer, reporter, and teacher. It was at the final career that he stopped me.

"You know, teaching is really great, and getting a degree in education is never a bad idea. At the very least, it's something you can always fall back on. We will always need teachers."

It wasn't until much later, as a teacher myself, did I know what Mr. Elias was doing. He, like so many others who have become entrenched in the field, knew the value of good teachers and the importance of inspiring others to come behind to continue the work. But at the time, all I heard was that all those pursuits were great, but if I was interested in teaching, then getting a degree in education is always a good idea. So, when I scrolled through the little boxes on my college's declared majors webpage, instead of just clicking "English," I clicked on "English teaching."

Turns out, I loved teaching. And I was good at it. However, after only five years in the field, I still left.

Being a Teacher

It's about

The ball,

The bat,

And the mitt.

The majority of my teaching career, a short four years after a year stint in middle school, took place at Valley High School, a large, older high school in an established community in Arizona. I think many new teachers expect to teach in classrooms like

they, themselves, had experienced in high school, and teach students like they had been. (Quick side note-- a study in 2005 found that teachers who personally had stronger academic backgrounds in secondary school were more likely to leave teaching (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006)). Valley High quickly doused me with a good amount of reality; turns out, the average sophomore in English class doesn't dream of becoming an English teacher or take home the teacher's copy of *Canterbury Tales* because it looks interesting. Leo was one of these average students. Leo had a solid "F" all semester. Despite what I tried, prodded, and scaffolded, he seemed an impenetrable mass that any and all teaching methods I had acquired throughout college and as a first-year teacher proved futile.

Ball hits

Bat, or it

hits mitt.

…

Bat waits

for ball

to mate.

Ball hates

to take bat's

bait. Ball

flirts, bat's

late, don't

keep the date.

For the semester final for my 10th graders I assigned them to memorize and recite a poem as part of the Poetry Out Loud national recitation competition that I was organizing at the school. It seemed simple right? Pick a poem of at least 15 lines. Memorize it, say it out loud. Bada boom, bada bang, and that's all folks. Your final. I felt this was generous. My students felt otherwise. On the day of the final we had all ranges of students well prepared and dressed in ties, to students who hadn't memorized the title and author of their poem. Leo was last to go. His denim shirt and cross necklace indicated that he'd made some attempt at dressing nicely for the occasion. He handed me his poem so that I could follow along and prompt if necessary.

"Good luck Leo,"

"It's a tricky one Miss," he replied.

"Just do your best!"

I was being nice; I didn't actually have very high expectations and my pen was already hovering over the weak and average marks on the six-point scale rubric.

And then, he began.

Ball goes in

(thwack) to mitt,

and goes out

(thwack) back

to mitt.

...

It's about

the ball,

the bat,

the mitt,

the bases

and the fans.

It's done

on a diamond,

and for fun.

It's about

home, and it's

about run.

Analysis of Baseball

By May Swenson

The room seemed to freeze, the snickering of un-expectant peers ceased, I held my breath, time stopped, and tears pricked my eyes. It wasn't an easy poem that he'd picked several weeks before. Well above the 15-line minimum and the refrains and staccato syntax made it difficult to remember properly. But he'd seemed excited about it. A subject he could relate to: baseball. And so, I let it be.

The entire thing poured out of him with sincerity and connection. I felt like my classroom walls disappeared and my chair, students, and Leo at the front had been transported to a deserted baseball diamond at dusk, illuminated by the stadium lights. He

scored second highest in my class (tied for first if the other students' extra credit wasn't factored in), and qualified for the competition for the finals, to become the class representative at the school competition a month later. He was dumbfounded, and awestruck. His score had pushed him to a D- for the semester. He wouldn't be retaking the first half of sophomore English.

This vignette recounts my teaching experience: peaks and valleys. The longer you teach, these few and far in between peaks keep you going and striving onward. However, as a new teacher, these moments are not yet memories and there are so many things to bog you down. While I tried to remember what I had collected, it wasn't enough.

Leaving the Field

As most teachers probably do, I entered the profession naive and hopeful. Armed with a head of *Freedom Writers Diary* and countless memories of motivating teachers and movies about those who made a difference, my pursuit was noble and passionate. I chose the teaching profession without knowing things. Without knowing how much teachers made. Not knowing how much work teachers did. Not knowing how many hours teachers put in before first hour and after sixth. I entered the teaching profession dazzled with brazen commitments and intentions for how I would be that "one" for those students who needed it. I arranged my desks so they faced each other and not the board. I wanted my classroom to be one of interaction, where students knew each other's names. Where we learned from each other and not just from me. I wanted them to discover themselves. Above my classroom whiteboard hung a banner with the Lewis Carroll quote, "Who in

the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle." I was committed to students unearthing at least one piece of that puzzle in the year they sat in my classroom.

I loved teaching. And as I sit here and write about it, I miss it. I miss the classroom that was my home for the better part of my years as an adult--where I learned how to navigate the world beyond security provided from someone else. I miss the students that would drift into my classroom before I was ready for them, just to chat--even though it was awkward, and we often had nothing to say. Sometimes just having a place to sit and wait until that first bell rang was what they needed--I learned that, even though at first I didn't understand. I miss the wit and jokes and laughter that was sophomore teenagers learning how to come into their own, to find friends that would last, and teachers who would care.

I remember the moments we had that brought tears to my eyes: when students succeeded beyond what they thought was possible. Long trips on school busses to debate tournaments where students truly cared--even though they were the underdogs and didn't grow up with the silver spoons of their competitors. I miss the colleagues that stood by each other through thick and thin. A teaching community is more than professional relationships but a bond of passion and understanding.

I remember one fall day during my final year being asked to meet with the vice principal during my prep hour. It was during this meeting that she caught me completely off guard by asking if I'd be interested in going through the state's Teacher of the Year application process--that she'd like to nominate me. I've never mentioned this to anyone apart from my husband until now, mostly because it felt so unwarranted and I felt

completely undeserving. I also knew it was never going to happen. Even then, I already knew it was my last year, even though no one else did. It was a devastatingly bittersweet moment of feeling honored and recognized for something I poured my entire being into, and also feeling like a traitor--A deserter--for the plans I knew I had ahead. I remember saying goodbye to my final class, those fifth period pranksters who often took the better part of a class period just to settle down, as they stood on their chairs in *Dead Poet's Society* fashion and put their hands in the air in the *Hunger Games* signal---they thought it was funny. As did I. But it was also sad.

I also remember the endless meetings that seemed to have no relevant point and kept me away from my students, the parents who wouldn't answer the phone, the requirements to do 300 things a day when sanity could only handle 279, and the countless number of students who passed through my course--full of potential that somehow went untouched-- who I felt I had failed. Then there were the bi-monthly pay checks that paid for food and rent and nothing more, and the conversation with your family of how so and so is a nurse and starting wage is $50,000--and yes they're saving lives and that's all fine and great, but so am I. Aren't I?

To be honest, had I stayed single, I would have kept teaching longer. But when I met my husband who had a good job that also provided health benefits, and we discussed having a family, teaching no longer made sense. The paychecks would go to child-care and little more. The long and inflexible hours would keep me from home, and even once home, teaching is not the kind of job that you leave in the brick and mortar of the school. The pile of essays to be graded come home, and the emotional duress of the day and

failing students stay with you. I also had always planned on pursuing graduate degrees, and with a financial partner, it was no longer required to work full-time to complete those pursuits.

After working in the field for five years, I turned in my classroom keys and joined the throngs of the thousands of educators who leave the classroom within the first five years.

The Research

The Untold Story

According to Ingersoll (2001), 40-50% of novice teachers leave within the first five years. Although more recent studies have debunked that figure, lowering the rate closer to 20% (Gray & Taie, 2015), at least one stable finding remains: attrition amongst new teachers is high (Clandinin et al., 2015;Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006). These stories, of those who go, are at large and often dominate our conversations on teachers, and monopolize the education highlights in local papers. Within recent years, two of my acquaintances, one being a past-colleague, were featured in news articles discussing the plights of being a teacher.

Both of these individuals provided details to their teaching exodus. One speaks at length of earning a Master's in education, while teaching English, and also bartending at night to make ends meet. However, she came to a point where the teaching load, stress, and financial discrepancies outweighed her desire to teach, so she left to work for a mattress company-- a more profitable and lifestyle-friendly gig (Chryssovergis, 2017). The second, an Arizona English Teacher Association award winner, discussed having to

choose between teaching and being able to afford proper healthcare and living expenses. When Arizona teacher pay raise demands were not adequately met in spring 2018, she also made the decision to leave for a career in commercial real-estate (Calfas, 2018).

Framing the Research Puzzle

Story after story can be found of similar accounts: teachers who choose to go. We know why teachers are leaving; the literature abundantly covers this topic and offers insight into the facets of teacher attrition. But what about those who stay? There is a large gap in the research involving teacher attrition on the opposite phenomena: teacher retention. Studies often ask the questions: What factors influence teacher attrition? What has led to the teacher shortage? How do we keep our best teachers? Why do new teachers leave? (all of these questions can be seen in a basic Google Scholar search of "teacher attrition"). However, an opposite search, one on "teacher retention" often reveals the same study questions or focuses on different ideas of how to keep teachers from leaving. So, what if I could share the counter narrative and provide the stories of those who have stayed? In this attempt, I wish to reveal true and personal identities of teachers that are constructed by themselves, and perhaps through their tales, we can learn a little bit about what may contribute to their choices to remain in the field.

A counter narrative or counter-story are ones that work to question the status-quo or complacency regarding mainstream ideas (Delgado, 1989). Additionally, a counter-story must be "noncoercive" and should invite the reader to "suspend judgement, listen for their point or message, and then decide what measure of truth they contain" (p. 2415). Simply, stories need to be told with an audience willing to listen and push out other ideas

or notions that may be popularly delivered. I believe this is important for the public to truly see teachers as they are and not as others portray them. According to Kim (2015) counter-stories are:

> the means by which groups contest the dominant ideology and the assumptions that support it. As counter-stories are the concrete particulars of the experiences of individuals or groups...they can open new windows into reality, help us construct a new world, and imagine possibilities for life other than the ones we have lived.

Like me, many other past teachers made the decision to leave the profession. These are the stories we and much of the public know. However, the counter-story or narrative can allow us to see something new.

Clandinin and Huber (2010) discuss a key term called relational research. This term derives from the idea that the researchers situate themselves within a relational aspect to their participants and consider themselves and their participants as co-composers to the stories being told. I just shared my story of leaving the teaching profession. In narrative inquiry, this reflective tale acts as an autobiographical narrative or a type of autoethnography in which I provide a construction of my own experiences. Bruner (2004) commented on understanding "life as narrative" which led him to claim that "the stories we tell about our lives ... [are] our 'autobiographies'" (p. 691). However, a component of narratives is that they are not remotely shaped. According to Freeman (2007) the autobiographical narrative inquiry is:

> the interpretation and writing of the personal past ... is ... a product of the present and the interests, needs, and wishes that attend it. This present, however—along with the self whose present it is—is itself transformed in and through the process. (pp. 137-138)

This tale is important as it led me to this current inquiry, the desire to know more about teachers who choose to stay. Who are they? And what is the difference between them and me? I believe the best way to answer these questions is through gathering the stories and experiences of others. Reflecting on Deweyan principles, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) commented:

> For Dewey, education, experience, and life are inextricably intertwined. When one asks what it means to study education, the answer—in its most general sense—is to study experience. Following Dewey, the study of education is the study of life—for example, the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors, and everyday actions. We learn about education from thinking about life, and we learn about life thinking about education. This attention to experience and thinking about education as experience is a part of what educators do in schools. (pp. xxii-xxiv)

While this quote lends itself to the connection between learning and experience, I project that the same holds true to teaching. Teaching is defined through experience. Teaching is more than a career; it is a life. In this inquiry, I look into questions that are deeply personal and tied to my life experiences, just as Huber (2008) claimed to, "reconsider my

narratives of experience and explore the stories I carried in me." This is a story that I have certainly carried in me.

This is my research puzzle. According to Clandinin and Huber (2010), "each narrative inquiry is composed around a particular wonder, rather than thinking about framing a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer." Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narrative inquirers frame a "research puzzle" that has "a sense of a search, a 're-search,' a searching again, a sense of continual reformulation" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). With this frame in mind, this study wishes to provide insight, understanding, and new stories; the stories of teachers who have stayed. Through these stories, the participants will be able to shed light on the choices and experiences that led to their retention in the teaching profession. Through a narrative methodology, this study will focus on four high school English teachers who have stayed in the field.

Research Questions

Primary Question

What do the teaching narratives of four secondary English teachers who have stayed in the field past five years reveal about teacher retention?

Sub Questions

1. What does each of the four teacher's story arc (teaching journey: past, present, future) reveal about retention?

***

I remember hugs in the hallways with students I didn't know, but I knew who hurt. Disappearing faces and not having done enough.

She came into my classroom, she apologized for being gone.

The school year was new, and her apologies were overdone.

Her face was moist, and her voice was hoarse, I hardly knew her, and I wanted to rescue her and tell her that it was okay. Everything was okay. But I had no right to say it so instead I grabbed her in a hug.

I pulled her into the hallway as she shared that she had moved. She had no choice, her foster home hadn't been a good situation and the group home mom, or foster mom--I'm not sure which one-- had lied and stolen, and she had to pack a bag and again move on.

She had finally made friends. She had finally felt safe. And now she was gone.

I tried talking to the school, to see if there was something that could be done.

Could we relocate her closer? Could we make sure she would be okay? I looked for her after school in the library. She said she would be there. She was gone.

I never saw her again, and I wish-- I had done more.

I wish I had known her.

I wish all babies could feel what it is like to be loved.

***

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Teaching is not a lost art, but the regard for it is a lost tradition.

—Jacques Barzun

Framing the Literature

While this study is being approached from a narrative and exploratory lens--one which hopes to capture the story and experience and not necessarily attempt to arrive at definitive conclusions, the question at root still remains: why do teachers stay? To best explore this question, the literature will delve into both sides of the inquiry: 1. Why do teachers go? / Attrition 2. Why do teachers stay? / Retention. From this review, you should be able to glean that the existing body of research is heavier on one of those sides--leading to a justification of needing to further the research on the other. In consulting the literature and providing context on the issues of teacher retention and attrition, both national and state figures are reported. While the issue of teacher attrition and retention is indeed a question for all educators, for the participants in this study, it is even more close to home. With the recent Arizona teacher walkout (spring 2018) in conjunction with the #RedforEd movement, Arizona teachers find themselves at the pinnacle of this issue.

Background of the Issue

Teacher retention continues to be a large, if not the largest, challenge facing the education system. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) stated that "among in-school factors, teachers have the greatest direct impact on student learning." Knowing that teachers play the most pivotal role in student learning, it is even that more alarming

that they are leaving. The actual percentage of teachers leaving is constantly debated. In 2001, Ingersoll conducted a study which concluded that 40–50% of teachers exit the profession within their first five years; this is a statistic that is heavily cited among educators and media (Ingersoll, 2001; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). However, in 2015, another study concluded that these figures may be closer to only 17% (Gray & Taie, 2015). Possible factors for the percentage discrepancy could have to do with the economic times of when the studies were completed. During Ingersoll's study, teaching jobs were not hard to come by and the job force was in a time of prosperity. During Gray & Taie's study, the economy was in downfall and people were less confident in leaving the security of their jobs. Nevertheless, while the more recent study might suggest that things are improving and moving in the right direction nationally, teachers are still leaving at vast quantities and more so in some states and certain types of schools than others. High poverty schools see twice the rate of teacher attrition than that of low poverty schools (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). Darling-Hammond (2010) of the Learning Policy Institute discussed that attrition isn't only a problem in new teachers, but in general for the profession:

> The uphill climb to staff our schools with qualified teachers is made that much steeper if teachers leave in large numbers in the face of difficult conditions and few supports. Less than 20% of total attrition is due to retirement, and especially in hard-to staff schools, both teacher dissatisfaction with the conditions of work and many teachers' lack of preparation are critical components of high turnover. (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p.18)

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) further investigated this question by analyzing the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2012-2013 Teacher Follow-Up Survey which had more than 3 million respondents. This analysis concluded that the total attrition rate increased from 5.1% in 1992 to 8.4% in 2005 and has since remained over 8% per year. Another 8% of teachers were found to move between schools every year.

Arizona

In the state of Arizona those numbers are even more grim. According to a 2015 Educator Retention and Recruitment Report by the Arizona Department of Education, 29% of teachers had three or less years of experience in the 2013-2014 school year. During this same school year, 24% of first year teachers and 20% of second year teachers left their positions and were not reported as teaching in Arizona (Arizona Department of Education, 2015). In May of 2017, the Arizona State University Morrison Institute released an education report further detailing these figures within Arizona schools (Hunting, 2017). According to this report, funded by the Arizona Community Foundation, Helios Education Foundation, and The Pike and Susan Sullivan Foundation, 42% of Arizona public school teachers and 50% of charter school teachers hired in 2013 quit by 2016.

Additionally, teacher vacancies across the state reached an all-time high in 2016-17 and continuing to the 2017-18 school year. The Morrison Institute Education Workforce Survey revealed that 81% of the 258 school administrators surveyed reported that filling teacher vacancies was “somewhat” to “extremely” difficult (Hunting, 2017, p.

21). According to a report based on a survey of 135 school districts and charter schools by the Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association (ASPAA), by October of 2017, over 1,300 Arizona classrooms were still in need of permanent teachers. The report showed that over 500 Arizona public school teachers quit by the end of August--or in the case of 147 teachers, simply left their classrooms without any notice.

Over 300 more resigned by the end of the fourth week. In addition to the 1,328 teacher vacancies that fall, another 2,491 classrooms were filled by people who were not professionally trained as teachers and did not meet state standard teaching requirements, but rather received emergency teaching certificates through auxiliary means. This equates to over 50% of classroom vacancies as having still been empty or filled by adults who were not traditionally considered highly qualified as teachers going into the third month of the school year (Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association (ASPAA), 2017). According to Hunting (2017), many teachers of the baby-boom generation are soon reaching retirement and both mid-career and early-career teachers are leaving. Hunting claims that there soon will not be enough new teachers to fill the vacancies of the teachers leaving, "over 20 percent of the new teachers hired each year do not return to the classroom the following year" (p. 20). National projections support this claim as well (Hussar & Bailey, 2014).

Attrition

So why are teachers leaving? This question touches on what Jordan, Kleinsasser, & Roe (2014) claim to be "the wicked" problem. According to the Morrison Institute Report by Hunting (2017), several themes emerged as to explain this teacher crisis:

professional pay, increasing workload, and professional support (p. 6). These causes can also be sorted into two categories of professional and personal dissatisfaction.

Professional Dissatisfaction

The annual national School Staffing Surveys (SASS) and Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) provide some insight into this question. Survey results from 1996 were analyzed by Ingersoll (2002) who identified that job satisfaction accounted for over 50% of teacher turnover. Teachers reported poor salary, poor administrative support, student discipline, poor student motivation, and lack of faculty influence, as the top causes of job dissatisfaction. The study also found that other reasons consisted of inadequate time, large class sizes, intrusions on teaching, lack of advancement opportunities, lack of community support, and an unsafe environment. Hunting (2017) found similar conclusions:

> Pay is only one element of the reason teachers leave. I think lack of respect from students, heavy workloads, lack of support from admin, etc. have equal impact. It gets to that point where a teacher thinks, 'I'm doing all this work, get no respect or support, and I'm only paid this much? 'That's the point when they leave.' – Survey response from high school teacher. (Hunting, 2018, p. 8)

In other words, there are many reasons in which teachers do not feel professionally satisfied in their careers.

A 2012 survey analyzed by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) showed similar reports. Teachers listed testing and accountability pressures, lack of administration support, dissatisfaction with career, lack of opportunities for advancement,

and dissatisfaction with working conditions as top reasons for leaving the profession. Although these results show that pay is not the entire cause of teachers leaving and job dissatisfaction, the 2012 survey still revealed that teachers in districts with higher maximum salaries (greater than $72,000) were 20 to 31% less likely to leave their positions than teachers in districts in lower maximum salaries (under $60,000). According to Hunting (2017), teachers were traditionally willing to sacrifice higher pay for a job they were passionate about in return for good benefits, predictable salary increases based on experience and education, and summer breaks. However, that model is changing, “In light of decreasing funding from both state and local sources, Arizona schools have had to alter salary schedules, reduce benefits and ask teachers to do more with less” (p. 32). Nationally, this holds true as well.

Another major cause in teacher attrition is increased workload and time demands. As schools have worked to economize on support staff, teachers have been asked to pick up extra duties without additional compensation or other tasks eliminated. These duties branch from hall and lunch duties, lunch and after-school tutoring, additional test preparation, clerical tasks, and others. If any compensation is available, it is often tied to student test scores which adds to the increased pressure (Hunting, 2017, p. 32). Preparing for national, state, and district standardized tests has also become an extreme burden and time-intensive factor as teachers have had to constantly re-work their curriculum. In the state of Arizona, in a span of five years, teachers went from preparing for Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) testing, to being told to prepare for Common Core testing such as The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and

Careers (PARCC), to Arizona's Measurement of Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching (AzMERIT) testing. In a case study by Cochran-Smith et al. (2012) one participant reported time demands as a key component to only staying on in his middle school position for two years.

As discussed, teacher responsibilities have increased in response to support staff positions in schools being eliminated. Some of these positions include administrative roles that may be over attendance, clubs, detention, sporting programs, and others in which teachers have had to put on the mantel. With the existing administrators being extra-stretched, teachers report feeling a lack of support. Another participant in the Cochran-Smith et al. (2012) study continually reported on the disappointment with administration in student discipline policies. This participant claimed that "high teacher turnover was a result of the administration's inability to uphold a clear educational vision or support teachers' work" (p. 20). In the Morrison Institute report, lack of support from administrators and mentors were stated as being among the most common reasons that teachers leave schools or the profession as a whole. Additionally, 52% of survey respondents cited strong administrative support as one of the top three factors for choosing a job (Hunting, 2017, p. 34). Many of these dissatisfactions are discussed in Sizer's (1984; 2004) *Horace's Compromise* in which the disgruntled teacher conditions of being overworked, overstressed, under supported, and under-resourced are put up with year after year with minimal school reform.

Now to the elephant in the room of why teachers leave: salary. According to the Learning Policy Institute, almost 20% of teachers leave the profession because of low pay

(Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Gray and Taie (2015) found that of the teachers who began teaching in 2007-2008, 12% left the profession after one year, 15% did not teach the following year, and 17% left by the third year. First-year salary was discovered to be a direct correlation to attrition.

> For example, 97 percent of beginning teachers whose first-year base salary was $40,000 or more were teaching in 2008–09, whereas 87 percent of those with a first-year salary less than $40,000 were teaching in 2008–09… 89 percent of beginning teachers whose first-year base salary was $40,000 or more were teaching in 2011–12, whereas 80 percent of those with a first-year salary less than $40,000 were teaching in 2011–12. (Gray & Taie, 2015)

Curtis (2012) also identified low salary as one of the main contributors to teachers leaving the profession. In a national study of teachers, participants were surveyed and interviewed on their reasons for becoming a teacher and possibly leaving the job. Participants leaving the teaching profession reported salary as the second highest factor for leaving after retirement (Curtis, 2012, p. 785).

The National Education Association (NEA) reports that inflation has eroded most of teachers' salary increases, "Over the past decade, the average classroom teacher salary has increased 15.2% but after adjusting for inflation, the average salary has actually decreased by $1,823 or 3.0%" (National Education Association, 2018). Additionally, the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) claims that comparable professions with similar education, degrees, and training, earn higher salaries:

> Nationally, teachers earn 19% less than similarly skilled and educated professionals. This "teaching penalty" has increased significantly in the past 20 years – from approximately 2% in 1994 to 19% in 2017. (Allegretto & Mishel, 2018)

Additionally, according to Levin et al. (2015), in 30 US states, teachers who are considered the head of families of four or more people qualify for three or more public benefit programs such as free or reduced lunch at school or subsidized children's health care. My co-worker, a single mother of six with a Master's in Education confided in me that her children qualified for free and reduced meals at school. This fact was shocking to me.

The NEA also debunks claims that teachers earn less because they have summers off and work shorter workdays. The majority of teachers report working over the contracted hours and during the summers.

> Because of low pay, new teachers often cannot pay off their student loans or buy homes in the communities where they teach. Teachers and other certified educators often work two or three jobs to make ends meet. The stress and exhaustion can become unbearable – forcing people out of their vocation. (National Education Association, 2018)

In Arizona, before the teacher walkout in spring of 2018, elementary school teachers were paid the lowest in the nation and secondary school teachers were ranked at 48 out of 50 states for lowest salary. With adjustment for inflation costs, both of these positions' salaries were down over 10% from what teachers made in 2001 (Hunting,

2017, p. 5). In response to the #RedforEd movement, Arizona educators received a 9% raise in the fall of 2018 with plans for another 5% raise in the following two school years (Press, 2018). Although these were positive strides, many Arizona educators still felt this wasn't enough.

Personal Dissatisfaction

The factors explained above are just a few of the many items research has found to indicate for teacher dissatisfaction and attrition from a professional lens. Many of these elements extend beyond a professional capacity, however, and begin to affect a teacher's personal life. These personal factors largely contribute to the alarming rate of teachers turning in their classroom keys. Some of these reasons include feeling a lack of social, communal, and political respect for the profession, emotional stress that is carried from school to home, and a low self-efficacy or motivation.

Teachers often report a passion for the job that extends beyond teaching but to the service to and care of their students (Hunting, 2017). However, the significance of this responsibility is often overlooked as teachers are often bombarded by constant criticism and blamed for school and student failures. With phrases like "those who can, do; and those who can't, teach," it's no wonder that teachers feel underappreciated for their talents, education, effort, and societal contributions. This perspective isn't new; in 1976 Florynce R. Kennedy, a U.S. lawyer, activist, speaker, and author stated that "anybody with the brains and energy to become a teacher ought to want to become something better."

Undermining the difficulty and training for what teachers do is often recited in the politics of education. Demanding that teachers follow a scripted curriculum, teach to high-stakes standardized tests, and constantly be evaluated on a rigid performance rubric dehumanizes the individual from the teacher, eliminates professional autonomy, and encourages an impossible assembly-line mentality within the classroom. Additionally, as more and more states adopt fast-track systems to certify teachers who may have no other qualifications than an undergraduate degree, teachers who have gone through years of training on education pedagogy and methods feel undervalued (Carter Andrews, Bartell, & Richmond, 2016).

These factors contribute to teachers feeling that others such as legislators and the general public presume to know more about how best to instruct students.

> Teaching, once viewed as an honorable profession, has come to be seen as a career of last resort for those just smart enough to get into a state university, but not clever or ambitious enough to make it through business or engineering school. Teachers care deeply about their work and expect to be treated like the professionals they are. (Hunting, 2017, p. 35)

As Pearson and Moomaw (2005) explain, "If teachers are to be empowered and exalted as professionals, then like other professionals, teachers must have the freedom to prescribe the best treatment for their students as doctors/lawyers do for their patients/ clients" (p. 38). These elements contribute to what many may call a hostile political climate around education. Mertler (2016) claimed, "In recent years, teachers have been collective victims of 'teacher bashing' and having their profession collectively 'dragged

through the mud' by mainstream media, as well as on social media" (p. 43). Hunting (2017) includes the pressure and lack of respect that teachers feel from parents when poor grades or misbehavior is often presumed to be the teacher's fault.

Stress (emotional and physical) and motivation are other leading personal factors that contribute to teacher dissatisfaction and attrition (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). Cochran-Smith et al. (2012) identified several types of teachers, in which "strong" teachers were described as still having difficulty creating workplace boundaries and escaping the effects of burnout:

> Every strong teacher in this study struggled with the demands of teaching and talked about leaving. In fact, the most capable and committed teachers seemed to be at particular risk of burnout—facing enormous demands with few boundaries in place to protect their time. (p. 34)

Strong teachers are the ones who are organized, creative, care for their students, provide thoughtful feedback, and put time and effort into their lessons; these are all attributes that can significantly take up a large chunk of additional time beyond the contracted and paid eight-hour day. English teachers, in particular, are often over-burdened with long hours past contracted time with the task of grading papers. A study by Paul Diedrich (1974) reported that English teachers had an average of 130 papers, spending eight minutes on them each, totaling 18 hours of grading. With larger class sizes in recent years, that number has only increased, edging closer to 150 papers. Additionally, when teachers feel that they cannot accomplish all that they want to, they become emotionally exhausted and lose motivation, leading to burnout and attrition (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Retention

The majority of the literature involving teacher retention doesn't answer the question "why teachers stay?" but rather, "what could help teachers stay?" Again, this turns the focus away from maybe what is working now and what current long-term teacher experiences are to the problem of teacher attrition--teachers are leaving, so what can we do about it? Even studies that claim to focus on the topic of teacher retention, are often seeded by discussion about teacher attrition: why and who the teachers are that leave. In a report by Michael Allen for the Education Commission of the States, eight questions were asked and researched to discover insight into teacher retention (2005), but again, the conclusions all revolve on evidence for attrition. Although these two questions of why teachers stay and what could help them stay may seem similar, and of course are interconnected, the discourse of the second has an innate focus on the negative situation rather than highlight and showcase those remaining in the vocation. This section will reveal literature answering those two questions, and in doing so, will reveal how different they really are.

What Could Help Teachers Want to Stay?

Research on this question often looks at the reasons for teachers leaving, and then asserts that by mitigating those factors, more teachers would stay. In a review of the literature, Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas (2016) state that research has found four major factors to influence teacher retention: compensation, preparation, mentoring and induction, and teaching conditions. According to Berg-Jacobson & Levin (2015), individuals are more likely to choose teaching if the compensation is comparable

to that of other professions. Additionally, teachers are more likely to stay if they work in districts with higher salaries. Students leaving college with higher debt are also less likely to choose or remain in education (R. Ingersoll & May, 2011).

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) asserted that "retaining teachers requires a comprehensive approach" (p. 32). This approach includes ensuring that teachers receive the training they need to be well-prepared to face the challenges of teaching. This is supported by a growing body of research that suggests that teachers who are more prepared for the field are more likely to stay (R. M. Ingersoll & May, 2011; Simon, Johnson, & Reinhorn, 2015). In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics in 2015, teachers without traditional pedagogical training are two to three times more likely to leave teaching within their first five years than their colleagues (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016).

Supportive induction and mentoring programs have also been found to help new teachers feel comfortable and confident in their work, increasing retention. Villegas & Irvine (2010) support this statement, finding that well designed mentoring programs increase teacher efficacy, confidence in instruction, and attitude-- all of which contribute to higher retention rates. Darling-Hammond (2015) comment on the keys to successful mentorship: "having a mentor teacher in the same subject area, common planning time with teachers in the same subject, and regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers." Mentor training and time to observe new teacher classrooms to provide coaching is also beneficial.

Lastly, surveys continue to support findings that teaching conditions and school environments affect teacher retention. Schools in higher socio-economic climates are far less likely to see the same turnover as schools in high-poverty areas that are often coupled with poor teaching conditions (supplies, access to resources, school aesthetic) (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). The support from administration, opportunities for higher education, and teacher-input in school-wide decisions also influences positive school environments.

Hattie (2008) also emphasized the importance of not baiting teachers to staying in the profession. For example, the public and policy makers' focus should not be on a "carrot and stick" approach where practices incentivize or penalize teachers based on test scores (such as performance pay). Additionally, methods such as "teacher-proof" curriculum, or generally "fixing teachers" should be avoided. Teachers, instead, need to be granted a level of autonomy and acknowledged for their expertise. In doing this, administrators and teachers should work together in making decisions for the school, and schools should "build that coalition of the willing and of the successful [teachers] to help run and have a major say in our schools" (pp. 14-16). Through this empowerment, teachers' self-efficacy within their profession is enhanced as well as their validation that they have true impact on student learning.

Why do Teachers Stay?

This question looks at the reverse-side of the issue. Rather than gathering data from participants who have departed teaching, data is gathered from active teachers in the classroom. Bobek (2002) conducted a series of in-depth interviews to research the

question of “resiliency.” What factors contributed to teacher resiliency that thereby reduced attrition? These factors were found to be career and competence skills, personal ownership of their work, a sense of accomplishment and recognition, and a sense of humor (Bobek, 2002). Bobek also concluded that strong personal relationships with colleagues helped to foster a sense of community and belonging, increasing teacher resiliency. Additionally, relationships with mentors and parents of students were found to be important factors for these participants.

In a study by Inman & Marlow (2004), surveys were sent across the state of Georgia to a random selection of teachers to complete a survey on job satisfaction and reasons for remaining in the field. Of the 500 surveys completed, approximately 40% identified as teachers with less than 10 years of experience. The teachers identified job security and work environment as major factors for remaining in the field. The study concluded that beginning teachers most benefit from supportive mentoring, colleagues with similar ideologies, supportive administrators, and a community that is supportive of education (p. 613).

In Arizona, a sample of ELA teachers who had participated in or supported the 2018 teacher walkout and #RedforEd movement were given a questionnaire and asked why they chose to remain in the classroom (Luszeck, 2018, p. 26). Of the responses, key terms that appeared most frequently were “love,” “teaching,” “kids,” “students.” One participant responded:

> I do it for the money, money, money! Just kidding. I do it for the kids! I do it for them because they are the future of our society and without great teachers, society

> will not have any chance of achieving progress. I'm playing the long game here; The only reason I stay in the classroom is the students. I think I make a difference in their lives. I can change the future in my classroom. I can love a student that feels unloved and help them move forward in a positive way. (p. 27)

These findings largely reflect that teachers are far more than financially motivated when it comes to their careers but are deeply emotionally connected to the profession. Many who stay, do so out of passion and commitment to the calling.

Why It Matters

Teachers leaving the classroom severely hurts schools and students. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) studied the effects of teacher turnover and found it is linked to teacher shortages, reduced student achievement, and extra costs. They estimated each replaced teacher cost schools approximately $20,000. According to Goldstein (Goldstein, 2014), these costs result from new teaching training and administrative procedures. Additionally, new teachers are often found to be less effective, requiring several years of experience before becoming a “master teacher” and reaching maximum effectiveness (Goldstein, 2014). Borman and Dowling (2008) note through their meta-analysis research that while attrition in other organizations can often weed out the less effective employees, that pattern does not seem to hold true to teaching, “There is somewhat more evidence suggesting that it is the more talented rather than the less talented teachers - those who are better trained, more experienced, and more highly skilled - who tend to be lost to turnover with greater frequency” (p. 396).

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) also found that teacher attrition specifically hurts schools serving students from lower socio-economic and ethnic minority backgrounds/households, widening the achievement gap. Furthermore, while schools are losing teachers, not enough are entering the profession to fill the vacancies (Hunting, 2017). According to Hussar and Bailey (2014), teacher preparation enrollment programs have fallen 35% nationwide in the last five years, a decrease of close to 240,000 teachers in total.

Students are the ones who suffer from oversized classrooms and unqualified educators. As a result, it is important to understand what motivates teachers to be in the classroom. Nevertheless, the teachers *in* the classroom need to be asked and not just the ones leaving it. In the "why do teachers stay?" section of this review, three studies are reported, one of which was done by me. Although searches in literature for the term "teacher retention" yield high results, few of these studies take on the specific approach gathering data from current teachers and what has led them to stay, in their words. This further supports the justification that more research is necessary to look at this counter-story of teacher attrition.

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There was a girl who I had, and I absolutely loved her, but she has a shitty, shitty, shitty life. And she asked me for my phone number. And normally I'd never do it, but something just said give it to her. So, I gave it to her ... her mom and dad are both in jail. Her brother is heading that way, following his parents' footsteps. She's such a good girl, but she has nobody. So, she has Grandma and Grandpa that she's living with. And you know they're elderly and they can only do so much... two days before Christmas I get this weird call from a number I don't recognize so I didn't answer and then I get this weird text message, "I need you right now." And I'm like, okay, so I called the number and it's my girl, and she's crying hysterically and she said "my grandma just died"...I was there for her in that moment...I stayed on the phone with her until 11:00 at night, and I'm just like, I just need to know that you're okay. So again, I follow my gut. I follow my instincts as best as I can...they're my kids...I need to make sure that they're okay.... I said, do you need me to adopt you? Do you need to come and live with me? And she's like, "No I got my grandpa and I can't leave him." So, I'm like, okay, I just need to know you're okay.
-Dian, Interview 1

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH AND METHODS

“What are these fundamental principles, if they are not atoms?"

"Stories. And they give me hope.”

— Neil Gaiman, Marvel 1602

Qualitative Research Methods

I chose this topic not to discover absolute conclusions or solutions to the plight of teacher retention, but instead to broaden understanding and meaning in the ELA teacher experience. I desire to give the readers of this dissertation an opportunity to draw their own findings and implications while I do the same alongside them. I am hoping to find meaning in something that has affected my own life, and perhaps see a future that I didn’t have. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2015), qualitative research seeks to gather meaning through how “people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 6). As this study focuses on the collecting and sharing of stories of four ELA high school teachers and uses these stories to answer the primary research questions, qualitative research methods best fit this purpose.

Qualitative data has a unique focus and interaction with the world. Qualitative researchers are also “routinely concerned not only with objectively measurable ‘facts’ or ‘events’, but also with the ways that people construct, interpret, and give meaning to these experiences.” It is also a dynamic process that looks to create and develop new meaning and concepts rather than apply “preconceived categories” on the people and

events they observe (Horowitz & Gerson, 2002). I am not beginning this study with a set hypothesis or perception of what I might find. Clandinin (2012) discusses this concept when describing providing advice to physicians who wish to do research on their patients' experiences. She tells them to begin with the story rather than the diagnosis. The data I collect from the teachers will be entirely inductive and constructed by the individual participant, though interpreted by me as the researcher (Barone & Pinar, 2000). This concept can also be explained by Frederick Erickson's (1986) "invisibility of everyday life" where the question of what is happening is not often initially clear or concrete but requires further observation and analysis (p. 4)

This study provides teachers an opportunity to both share and create their own story of what it means to be a teacher and how their experiences and understanding of themselves as professionals relates to their choice to remain in the field. This study cannot reveal for all teachers what the magic ingredient is to teacher retention, what will keep all teachers in their classrooms rather than making the decision to leave. However, this study will provide a glimpse into the real lives of four high school teachers and what matters to them. This dissertation acts as a counter narrative to the teacher attrition crisis where the stories of teachers who leave are plentiful and the conception of who teachers are within the walls of our schools are told by news stations, politicians, parents, and even students. The participants in this dissertation will speak for themselves and create their own profile.

This level of meaning through lived experiences and the sharing of those experiences is a further factor of qualitative research. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as the following:

> Qualitative research is multi method in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter...qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use of and collection of a variety of empirical materials… that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives (p. 2)

Teachers will be interviewed in settings of their choice as well as will be observed in their classrooms. These natural settings allow the teachers to be observed and interpreted in environments of their control and comfort. Teachers will also be providing a narrative on the meanings they have created about how they view themselves within their profession, which is their interpretation of events created around them, by them, and for them. Multiple sources of data will also be collected to assist compiling a holistic picture of the teachers' experiences.

This type of data collection is often contrary to what is expected in more traditional research, where data is comprised of numbers and absolute conclusions. Clandinin (2006) comments on this distinction by stating the following about the differences between qualitative and quantitative research:

> Quantitative research rests exclusively in positivistic and post-positivistic assumptions. In contrast, qualitative research forms around assumptions and

> interpretation and human action. Another difference is the purpose of the research. Qualitative researchers are interested not in prediction and control but in understanding. (p. 4)

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study is not to come to an absolute conclusion of how to solve the issue of teacher attrition and ensure that our teachers stay in the classroom. Instead, I aim to share the stories of those who have remained in the classroom, stories that are often overlooked for being less exciting or emotionally enthralling than the stories of those who leave. These told experiences in return may offer glimpses into common factors of how teachers who stay view their profession, students, environment, and themselves within the role of a teacher.

Narrative Research Methods

In this section I attempt to explain my more specific methodological and theoretical stance within the framework of qualitative research: narrative inquiry. As I explain the why, what, and how— it is important to note that these things are not mutually exclusive and easy to discuss in neat and separate sections. They often weave together as the why is sometimes very much the what, and the what can turn into the how. Regardless, as I continue to learn more about narrative inquiry and the abstract nature of stories-- how they are all around us, within us, and can provide insight to what we do and do not know— placing structure on something that largely feels structureless is necessary to help us organize content. Just as a story has twists and turns, often the organization within of the beginning, middle, and end, helps us to see the events unfold in a sequential state that allows for comprehension, dimension, and analysis.

Why Narrative Inquiry?

I expressed that this study was designed as a qualitative methodology in order to seek meaning in a story and experience that is unknown. My story of teaching ended like thousands upon thousands of others, becoming a statistic of leaving the teaching profession within the first five years. However, what is the story I don't know? The one that could have happened if I stayed? This story is not only unknown to me, but it is unknown to the vast majority since the emphasis of inquiry is often on the why of teachers leaving opposed to the why and what and how of teachers staying. Narrative inquiry allows us to have access to glimpses of these particular stories. According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000) "Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative plotlines" (p. 121). In an interview with Clandinin, when asked what researchers should do when wanting to attempt a narrative inquiry approach, she advises that the narrative approach is "relational research" and you must "start with yourself" (Clandinin, 2012); this is what I am doing.

My relationship to this study is as an active participant in part of the plot, but as a character that left the story before the climbing action had even been completed. "There is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71). I wish to tell a story that I have not lived. As such, others, who have, will be the protagonists. Clandinin (2013) states that researchers, or inquirers must begin with a justification of the research, "justifying the inquiry in the context of their own life experiences, tensions, and personal

inquiry questions" (p.36), therefore, this is my justification: there is a story unknown to me, and I speculate most, that still needs to be told. Relating these experiences and stories through a narrative inquiry methodology acts as an avenue to allow me to do so. Furthermore, narrative inquiry provides a voice for those normally unheard (Creswell, 2012).

Teachers' stories are often provided through voices that are not their own: media, politicians, parents. Who a teacher is, is often embodied as a single story: one that is failing our schools and our students. As Adichie warns, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete" (2009). Narrative inquiry gives the power of the story back to the ones who own it and live it as well as provides for multiple stories rather than the one.

Narrative inquiry has a practical justification as well. Clandinin (2012) states that this type of research has the ability to influence policy, "if we have the policy makers listen to the stories we are trying to tell." Clandinin (2013) also discusses the importance of narrative inquiry in enabling change and allowing for a "possibility of shaping, or changing practice" (p. 36). The author and lecturer, (McKee, 2019) echoed this notion when he stated that, "storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today." Through stories comes the possibility of discovering new meaning through individualized accounts and experiences rather than impersonal bulks of faceless data and numbers, "narrative inquiry opens possibilities for shifting stories, and therefore, lives" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 213). Specifically regarding teaching retention, stories can assist a better language to develop, as Clandinin (2012) commented,

the language can be changed from “retaining teachers” to “sustaining teachers in their lives.”

Lastly, one of my primary goals as a scholar, teacher-educator, and educational researcher is to work for and with teachers. Often, academic research in education is criticized for just that: a lapse in practical application. Research on teachers is often not written *for* teachers but rather other academics as it takes on a more theoretical approach. This type of work is also commonly viewed as inaccessible to teachers in the field. According to Creswell (2012), narrative research allows educators to look for practical and specific insights, “By conducting narrative studies, researchers establish a close bond with the participants. This may help reduce a commonly held perception by practitioners in the field that research is distinct from practice and has little direct application” (p. 502). While my audience can be for education researchers and others in academia, my primary audience seeks to be with the teachers themselves, after all, this is their story.

What is Narrative Inquiry?

Telling stories is something we all do. It is almost impossible to be at a social event, listen to a person tell a story about a recent or past experience, and not have the story act as a generative process to incite your own recollection of a past event in your life. Stories act as a way to interpret our experiences and make meaning of our lives. Michael Margolis, CEO and founder of “Get Storied” as well as a consultant to large companies such as Facebook and Google, stated that, “The stories we tell literally make the world. If you want to change the world, you need to change your story. This truth

applies both to individuals and institutions"(Margolis, 2010). As such, stories, or narratives act as a valuable source to data collection.

Narratives offer the participant to be in control and an active agent in the data that is presented and not act as a dupe (Elliott, 2005). According to Riessman (2008), these stories or narratives act as glimpse into one's identity construction. As a researcher, narratives act as an authentic and highly informative data source. They tell us how these participants see the world around them, interpret the events of their lives, and convey those experiences to others, "our identities as human beings are inextricably linked to the stories we tell ourselves, both to ourselves and one another" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 214). They also act as a controlling factor to how others view them. A storyteller who wishes to be viewed as impressive and accomplished will share stories that act as evidence to that view. What and how a story is constructed acts as a construction of self-identity and of how others perceive the narrator's identity.

In this study, I aimed to provide a venue for teachers to share their stories and create their own narratives of their teaching journey and career retention. Methods in narrative inquiry fulfill this intent. Narrative research methods focus on participants "mak[ing] sense of events and actions in their lives with themselves as the agents of their lives" (McAlpine, 2016). In education studies, narrative is often used to recount "the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions" (Connelly, Clandinin, & Ming Fang He, 1997, p. 666). This is often accomplished by a researcher through semi-structured interviews with the participants,

allowing the participants to narrate the experiences of their past, present, and perceptions and intents of the future.

Narrative inquiry derives from a Deweyan epistemological and ontological framework (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Becoming more popular in education research in the 1990s, narrative inquiry was influenced by the increased emphasis on teacher reflection and more attention given to what teachers know and how they think and make classroom decisions. This method led to empowering teachers by allowing them to share their experiences and stories (Cortazzi, 1993; Creswell, 2012). According to Clandinin (2013), "narrative inquiry is a way of studying people's experiences, nothing more and nothing less" (p. 38).

Narrative also acts as a way of knowing. Bruner (1986) discussed that there are two types of human cognition: paradigmatic and narrative. Paradigmatic is explained as a scientific and categorization process that would lend itself to more quantitative study. Narrative, on the other hand, is ''human or humanlike intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course'' (p. 13). It is how humans make sense of the abstract that cannot be measured, a way in which human experiences are organized. Polkinghorne (1988) commented on this phenomenon by claiming that it is through narrative that significance to events are ascribed and how those experiences affect the whole (p. 18).

Furthermore, Pinnegar & Daynes (2007) describe turns within narrative research. These are changes in thinking from traditional research methodology. Those turns are:

relationship between researcher and participant, from numbers to words as data, moving from the general to the particular, and "blurred knowing" (p. 25).

1. Pinnegar & Daynes (2007) write in regard to the researcher-participant relationship:

> In the move toward narrative inquiry, the turn is characterized as a movement away from a position of objectivity defined from the positivistic, realist perspective toward a research perspective focused on interpretation and the understanding of meaning. In turning, narrative inquirers recognize that the researcher and the researched in a particular study are in relationship with each other and that both parties will learn and change in the encounter." (p. 9)

Clandinin echoes this relational aspect by stating that narrative research has a focus on "research with" rather than "research on" like most forms of research methodology (Clandinin, 2012).

2. Pinnegar & Daynes discuss how narrative inquiry has a focus on words rather than numbers as a form of data. They claim that while numbers should not be rejected, they lose the nuances and significance of certain relationships and experiences that take place within a particular setting (p. 15).

3. In narrative inquiry, we move away from the general and focus rather on the particular.

Maxine Greene (1984) discussed this matter when describing the situation as a matter of perspective:

> Surely it is important for them to discern the difference between the perspective of a statesperson or federal commissioner and that of the teacher or the administrator in an actual school. The first is likely to look out on the world strategically, or see it 'small'… like a chessboard or a distant battlefield. The second, the involved person, is more likely to see it 'big' without clear demarcations. Each face, for this person, is likely to be magnified and distinctive; details overlooked by the outside observer—dusty windows, noises in the corridors, dog-eared workbooks, lesson plans—are inescapably clear" (p. 284).

Narrative inquiry puts a face to the issue. A person behind the data, creating meaning beyond a number's capability. When we speak of the ways of persuasion--ethos, pathos, and logos-- a number may provide the logic, but without the human connection, there is no real comprehension and urge which connects one to the argument. Narrative inquiry is the pathos of qualitative research.

4. The final turn is described by Pinnegar & Daynes (2007) as "blurred knowing." This is essentially an argument that there is more than one way of knowing and discovering truth that should be considered valid (p. 25).

Narrative inquiry is also concerned with the ideas of temporality, sociality, and place as a way to distinguish from other methodologies. These constructs help to provide a framework in which to conduct research study. While an outline of what these terms

mean in relation to narrative research are described below, the specifics of each in regard to this study will be relayed later on.

Temporality- discussing events and people in relation to time.

Sociality- attending to personal and social conditions. Connelly & Clandinin (2006) define personal conditions as the "feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions" of both the researcher and participant. Social conditions are those conditions in which the events and experiences are happening under (D.J. Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The relationship between the inquirer (researcher) and the participant is also part of this sociality construct.

Place- "the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Both the place of the original experience being narrated as well as the place where the account is being told are important to narrative inquiry.

The final construct of narrative inquiry that I wish to discuss provides more insight into the methodological and theoretical stance that this study falls under. According to Elliott (2005) and Pinnegar & Daynes (2007), there are three different types of methodological stances within narrative inquiry: Sociocultural, Naturalist, and Literary. These stances are described as follows by McAlpine (2016):

> Sociocultural: The focus here is the broad cultural narratives that influence individual experience. This stance asks: What stories do people tell and use to participate in local practices? How are such stories cultural resources, that is,

based in common narratives that individuals can call on and modify to better represent their own experiences?

Naturalist: The focus here is rich descriptions of the content of people's stories about significant issues. So, data serves as a resource to ask: What experiences has this person had? What do these experiences mean to him or her? What complicating actions and evaluative aspects are highlighted?

Literary: This approach, rarely used alone, is often integrated into either of the other two stances. The focus is the discourse that individuals use to describe their experiences: What images and metaphors (specific language) prevail in narratives that represent powerful influences on experience? What narrative arcs (actors, settings, plotlines), positive and negative, prevail in accounts? (p. 36-7)

My research question focuses on how teachers narrate their teaching experience and how that may have affected them staying in the profession. This question lends itself to a naturalist epistemology and ontology of the study. The focus is on the individual teachers' stories and their shared experiences, how they interpret those experiences, and evaluate them.

How to do Narrative Research

According to Creswell (2012), there are seven steps to conducting narrative research:

1. Identifying a phenomenon to explore that addresses an educational problem--this is my research question

2. Purposefully select an individual from whom you can learn about the phenomenon (participants and recruitment)
3. Collect stories from the individual that reflect personal and social experiences (data collection)
4. Restory or retell the individual's story (analysis)
5. Collaborate with the participant storyteller in all phases of research
6. Write a story about the participant's experiences (findings)
7. Validate the accuracy of the report (p. 514)

This section will explain my process for each of these steps, my presentation of the narrative research, and more specific detail of recruiting participants, gathering data, and analyzing the data.

The aesthetic.

A common practice in narrative inquiry is that after the data has been collected, the researcher retells, or remaps the stories that have been collected from the field texts. This is referred to as restorying. In restorying, the researcher has initially analyzed the stories and re-presents them in a logical story sequence specific to time, place, plot, and scene (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, the task of restorying also requires the researcher to convey the fluid nature of stories themselves. Just as a piece of fiction can be reread and reviewed finding different meanings and interpretations, a story in narrative research should be approached the same way. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) wrote:

> The creation of further meaning, which might be called "the restorying quality of narrative," is one of the most difficult of all to capture in writing. A written

> document appears to stand still; the narrative appears finished. It has been written, characters' lives constructed, social histories recorded, meaning expressed for all to see. Yet, anyone who has written a narrative knows that it, like life, is a continual unfolding where the narrative insights of today are the chronological events of tomorrow. Such writers know in advance that the task of conveying a sense that the narrative is unfinished and that stories will be retold and lives relived in new ways is likely to be completed in less than satisfactory. (p. 9)

Hannah Arendt (1968), German-American philosopher, stated that "storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it." In order for me, as the researcher and inquirer, to deliver the narratives of the participants in a way that maintains the integrity of the stories they tell, as well as keep the fluidity of narrative intact, I employ a narrative, or impressionistic tone in this study. Dissertations have a long tradition of being organized in a certain fashion, which I adhere to. However, the narrative nature of this study requires a narrative account. This can be observed beginning with my story as seen in the introduction, and recounted as my justification--a type of autoethnography (Creswell, 2012) -- but largely implemented in the findings section where the stories of the participants are retold.

The term *impressionistic tales* was coined by John Van Maanen (1988) to refer to narrative writing that allows for "an open, participatory sense in the viewer and as with all revisionist forms of art, to startle complacent viewers accustomed to and comfortable with older forms" (p. 101). Recounting data in this way allows for the reader to

experience the data and events in the same fashion that the inquirer did. Van Maanen notes that impressionistic tales assist in keeping the validity of the narratives:

> There are in the telling of the tales many opportunities, of course, for the fieldworker-author to slip out of the story and make an analytic point of two. These interruptions are not unnoticed by the audience, nor are they always welcomed. Tellers of impressionistic tales, once they begin, must keep the narrative retelling or risk losing continuity and with it their audience. The power of a story to spark interest and involvement is as much a function of staying close to the sequential, immediate, and tightly linked flow of events as it is a function of the substance of the tale itself. The point here is that the audience knows very well what is part of the story and what is not. (p. 103)

Restorying and *impressionistic tales* don't tell the reader how to interpret the stories, but rather shows them the narratives "from beginning to end and thus draw them … into the story to work out its problems and puzzles as they unfold" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 103).

Researcher positionality.

In this study, I position myself as an insider-outsider. As an insider, I have taught in the state of Arizona as well as have personal connections to others still in the field. However, I am also an outsider because I am no longer employed as a secondary English teacher and have separated myself from participants as an explicit researcher with a clear agenda to gather data. According to Merriam et al., (2001) both of these positions present benefits and difficulties. As an insider, I have a more authentic understanding the culture; however, I also am inherently biased because of my experience. An outsider has the

advantage of asking more probing questions motivated by curiosity that can lead to significant data. I can also be considered a focused participant observer, which Tracy (2012) describes as, "a researcher who enters a scene with an explicit researcher status and a clear agenda of which data to gather in the scene" (p. 128). However, as a narrative inquirer, I also have a heightened element of relationality with my participants. In a way, the narratives gathered are co-constructed as the participants narrate them as prompted by me and for me.

Temporality, sociality, place.

As previously discussed, Temporality, Sociality, and Place are qualities of narrative inquiry that move it away from other methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). These are essentially fulfilled by the questions: when, who, and where. The narratives in this study were gathered in the spring semester of 2018, however, the stories collected span well before and well after as the participants were to recount events and experiences that led up to their teaching call, their present experiences as a teacher, and their expectations and perceptions of their teaching in the future.

Four ELA teachers were recruited for this study. All of these teachers have been in the field for longer than five years, which is statistically significant in regards to teacher attrition (Gray & Taie, 2015; R. M. Ingersoll, 2001). When seeking participants, the number of years having taught worked as one qualification, the second was that they needed to be teachers of the ELA content area. The reason for this is because as a former English teacher myself, this expanded my ability to have a relational aspect to the study and the participants. Additionally, the stories of teachers from different content areas may

lend themselves to individual nuances that are distinct and unique to their discipline. When investigating the question of retention, having stories that may share common factors such as the content being taught and the workload/ grading that comes from that specific subject, can be important factors when later completing analysis and identifying themes.

Two of the four teachers recruited, Callie and Amanda, are people who I am well acquainted with. One of the other participants, Dian, had been introduced to me prior to the study, and the final participant, Ruth, was recommended by Dian. This recruitment process makes this a convenient sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). These teachers also span in their years of teaching experience, teach a variety of different ELA grade levels and courses, and come from two different high schools that can be considered "sister schools." These qualifications also define this as a purposeful sample, which Tracy (2013) describes as "choosing a meaningful sample that fits the parameters of the project's research questions and goals" (pp. 153, 155). Although all the participants have common demographics-- white and female, (though Dian also claims Latinx and Indigenous background) -- this is consistent with the teacher sample in Arizona. In a 2012 Schools and Staffing Survey by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 80% of teachers were reported as white and 13% Hispanic; 79% of teachers were reported as female.

The actual setting for the majority of data collection was chosen by the participant which in narrative inquiry allows the participants to have further control of their environments and presentation. Callie and I met for interviews both in her classroom and

at a local coffee shop; Amanda requested all interviews to happen in her classroom during her morning prep hours; Dian and I met at different coffee shops for both interviews; and Ruth and I first met at a cafe and then in her classroom. However, the schools these participants work at are some of the largest high schools in the state, and reside in urban neighborhoods. Two schools were chosen to deliver a variety of context and background to the participants. According to a 2018 demographic report, the high school that Callie and Amanda teach at, Valley High School, consists of 26.7% White students, 4.4% Black, 63% Hispanic, 2.4% Native American, 2% Asian, and 1.4% other. Fifty-Six-point six percent are in a single home family dwelling, 21% are in a one-parent family, 52% report English as their primary language, and 67.7% are on free and reduced lunch. Eastridge High School, where Dian and Ruth teach, has 24.7% White students, 7.3% Black, 53.2% Hispanic, 11.1% Native American, 2% Asian, and 1.5% other. Forty-Five percent are in a single home family dwelling, 22% are in a one-parent family, 61% report English as their primary language, and 72% are on free and reduced lunch. Further place and participant descriptions can be found in chapter four.

Data collection.

Narrative research most often utilizes data collection methods of interviews, documents, field notes, and descriptions of events organized into a story or re-story of the data. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 16; Creswell, 2012). Consistent with these practices, the primary instrument for data collection for this study is the use of in-depth one-on-one interviews at separate times with each participant. These interviews are an adapted version of Seidman's (2013) three-part interviews. This interview model combines life-

history interviewing and "focused, in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from phenomenology" (p. 15). Seidman's interview process consists of conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant. This method allows for background and context to be established in the first interview, "where I have been." The second interview allows participants to "reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them" (Seidman, 2013, p. 17). In other words, the second interview is the "Where I am now" and the third acts as the "Where I am going" reflection.

As I am focusing on more than one participant for my study, two interviews adapted from this model seemed sufficient. The first interview focused on the context and background of the participant, as well as current experiences. The second interview, scheduled approximately one month after the first interview, continued to reflect on current experiences and moved into reflections and desires for the future as well and perceptions on career impact and retention. These interviews can be classified as semi-structured interviews which is defined as "a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions" (Ayres, 2008).

These interviews consisted of crafted questions prepared beforehand based off a list of topics to be covered. These interviews also allowed for no "fixed-range of responses" (Ayres, 2008). The interview protocol I used with my participants consisted of both topical based questions and specifically worded questions. This variation allowed

for diverse experiences and stories of the participants to be gathered, but also maintained consistency between participants in order to analyze the stories and look for similar codes and themes amongst them. The interview guide I used can be found in Appendix A.

Another tool that was used to navigate the first interview as well as work as a document of the participants' were participant-created graphics of their personal teacher-journey. Additionally, during the second interview, the participants created "time capsules" of teaching artifacts throughout their teaching experience to discuss student impact and memories. This idea originated from my participation with the Central Arizona Writing Project (CAWP) summer institute where all participants were asked to create a teacher self-portrait with an accompanying artist's statement. These portraits varied from magazine cut-out collages to water-colored abstractions of how we view ourselves in our teaching roles. These images offer an alternative view of experience that cannot be captured with words. Ewald & Lightfoot (2001), authors of *I Wanna Take Me a Picture: Teaching Photography and Writing to Children*, offer similar insight when discussing using self-images to inspire writing:

> When working as writers, we are not tied to the physical world; we have a lot more freedom when it comes to describing a subject. Still, symbols or details remain important tools for conveying emotion or the essence of a situation. In simplest terms, what does the dawning of a sunny day usually mean in a story? Or a clock ticking on the wall?... Ask your students to think about how they would take a portrait of the person deep inside themselves--the person nobody knows.

> Where would they place themselves...how would they show such states of mind…" (Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001).

Image and color are just as important to story and experience as words and conversation. These graphics helped the participants to tell their stories and guide their interview responses in a way that could not be otherwise accomplished. A similar practice, the use of participant-created visuals to guide conversation and as individual data, can be seen in a study by Grenier & Burke (2008). In this study, concept maps, or sketches and drawings, were used to talk about the researchers' autoethnographic narratives of their journeys as mothers and PhD students. Smagorinsky et al. (2004) also used concept maps in a study with pre-service teachers in order to allow the participants "to produce individual conceptions of their teacher education program's emphases" (p. 223). Likewise, the teacher journey concept maps allowed my participants to organize their own perceptions on their teaching inception.

Field texts were also used as a data source. In narrative research, field texts represent information from different sources collected by the researcher (Creswell, 2012, p. 508). While this can include the interviews and teacher journey map, and teaching artifacts, it also includes researcher observations and experiences while collecting the data. This is mostly seen as I observed each participant during a class period in their classrooms, met with the participants to discuss the parameters of the study, and met to hold the interviews. Field notes during each of these encounters was written or audibly recorded. Additionally, many of these field texts included photographs of the teacher's

classrooms, and the artifacts they supplied during their second interview for their "teaching time-capsule."

While the emphasis of the data is on how the participants present themselves, through their narratives, actions, and responses, narrative research mandates a relational study that often results in data collection acting as a negotiated interaction (Taylor, 2007) and co-construction between researcher and participant (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). The narrative inquiry approach "views the participants and researcher as taking part in a collaborative relationship" rather than being completely isolated or objective from the stories collected (Durand, 2012). My observations, perceptions, and influence on the data cannot be completely eliminated.

Analysis.

In analyzing narrative research, the first steps are to retell the stories gathered in a process referred to as restorying (Creswell, 2012). In order to restory the participants' provided narratives, I defined elements of setting, characters, actions, problems, and resolutions in order to remap the data in a coherent and compelling way. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also advise using a three-dimensional space narrative structure. This focuses on the elements of interaction, continuity, and situation. Interaction is targeted to the personal interactions the individual has on feelings, hoped, and reaction as well as social interactions and views of others. Continuity connects past events that may be relevant to the content being presented, and situation informs the context, time, and place (Creswell, 2012).

This stage of analysis, also referred to as structural analysis (Riessman, 2008), involves creating codes for these elements of restorying. In order to create a coding scheme for the three-dimensional space narrative structure, broader categories of interaction, continuity, and situation are used. Then codes of personal, social, past, present, future, and place. This can be seen as well as the rules for data inclusion in the below table.

Interaction		Continuity			Situation/place
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions.	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people feelings, and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view.	Look backward to remember experiences and stories from earlier times.	Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event.	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines.	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view.

Figure 1: Three Dimensional Space Narrative adapted from Clandinin and Connelly, 2000

For my analysis, these codes were applied broadly, separating restoried sections of situation/ place from interaction and continuity sections. Then, the participants' narratives were restoried with focus on continuity of past, present, and future. This "restorying" stage and further organization is found and further explained in chapter four. Below is an example of direct transcript and then how it was "restoried":

Transcript:

Ruth: [00:02:53] OK. Well my family my dad. And my mom both were. Big readers. I remember. very very young. And my mom. She loved reading historical

romances. So when I was supposed to be taking a nap or when I'm the oldest of three. So when the younger kids were supposed to be taking a nap you would just have quiet time. And I was supposed to be reading my own books but it was. I would. Just like to watch my mother read it was. And I would rub her back it was fun. And then. So I was always always always a good reader. Yeah. I would read all sorts of books. And then let's see. When I was when I was in middle school, I started reading historical romances like my mom. And I was always read horror as well. Horror stories of Stephen King also. That's when I read the outsiders came out the movie came out and that's when I read the book and then I read I would read a book and then read everything I could from that author because I liked Yeah. With that author had so and I made friends with the librarian at our school and she would just give me all of these recommendations. Yeah. And then I read a lot of Stephen King. And. I knew. Right. So then the rule became when I was in middle school. That I could read if my dad didn't like me reading no romances because they had. Sex. Oh yeah. And so he said OK. He's like. [00:04:51] I can't stop you from reading the romance. But here's the deal you have for every romance book you read. You have to read a classic book. OK. So was like OK Dad. So then I started reading it. I know I know you're reading all the romance classic. so read all those. But I also read. I read. Was it Walden. Walden and Watership Down and like the very you know. I also read. Animal farm. And this is outside of school. This is when I was in middle school I read *Animal Farm*...

Restoried:

> **Ruth:** Both of my parents were really big readers and so it became something that I loved to do as well. I would read all sorts of books. When I was in middle school, I started reading historical romances like my mom, and I always read horror as well. I made friends with the librarian at our school and she would just give me all of these recommendations. Then when I was in middle school my dad didn't really like me reading romances because they had sex, but he was like, "I can't stop you from reading romance, but here's the deal, for every romance book you read, you have to read a classic book." So, then I started reading things like *Walden, Watership Down*, *Animal Farm,* all outside of school.

Lastly, using Dedoose, an online computer software which allows for text analysis, transcripts of all interviews and field texts were uploaded and analyzed. These texts were coded descriptively which explained by Saldana (2009) is a summary of a word or short phrase, "the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p.70). Once codes were created throughout all documents, I used Dedoose to create a large Excel spreadsheet that allowed each marked passage to be organized by code, with field describing where the text passage came from (which participant, and what interview/ observation) (see Figure 2).

Initial Code(s) Applied	Definition	Excerpt From Narrative Data	Data Source
Autonomy	Instances in which Participants indicate enjoying being the master of their classrooms, being able to make the decisions for the best practices of their students, have freedom of choice and minimal oversight	I want to leave is when someone comes to me and says hey you know that great idea that you have you can't do it because I said So	Callie_interview_2.do
Autonomy		But at the end I don't know if you know anything about. I know. OK so they have all different kinds of like assessments and they have. Acronyms for everything they have IAs and Eas and TOK. I it's just. It's like the top one percent of the kids can take this. But so they have an internal assessment which I grade and they have an external assessment which they sent it off to Zimbabwe. For all I know and then some teacher who doesn't know my kids grades them and then based on that is whether or not they actually pass the program. And I was I was such a type A and I am a control freak and I and I know that I micromanage but I'm like it infuriated me every time that I would give my kids these good grades because I know what they know and what they put into it and then they come back with like D and they wouldn't pass the class. And I mean it broke my heart. So I'm like I can't do this. S	Dian_interview_1.doc

Figure 2. Initial code, definition, example, source

From here, I used Rodesiler and Pace's (2015) model to organize by initial code, definition, and example from narrative data (p. 356). Therefore, definitions for each initial code were created. There were 23 initial codes and definitions created. Then using Bernard's (2000) "mechanics of grounded theory," I identified potential categories or themes that arose from these initial codes, leading to five themes or threads as I refer to them in chapter five. These initial codes organized by threads can be seen in the chart below.

Threads	**Work Environment**	**External Factors**	**Students First**	**Pedagogy/ Style**	**Personality Markers**		
Individual Codes	School Environment	Home Life	Love for students	Innovative Methods	**personality**	**Identity**	**Impact**
	Colleagues	Breadth of Experience	Positive Teacher/ Student Encounters	Student Engagement	Humor	Passion for teaching	
	Politics		Student Rapport	Pushing Student Potential	Leadership		
	Autonomy			Diversity	Content Passion		
				Classroom Management	Beyond Classroom Involvement		
					Love for learning/ school/ teaching		

Figure 3. Thematic analysis chart organized by threads and initial/individual codes

The first two stages of analysis can be described as structural analysis: how a participant constructs a narrative. The last stage is considered more of a thematic analysis in which there is a focus on the content of the narrative, and what the participants say (Riessman, 2008). Combining these two analysis methods "exposes broad patterns of thematic similarities across participants while also recognizing variations in meaning for individual participants" (Rodesiler & Pace, 2015, p. 355). Again, further explanation of how these codes were specifically used to organize and present data can be seen in the following chapters, with chapter four employing structural analysis and the restorying process and chapter five utilizing thematic analysis.

Limitations of the Study

Researcher bias.

During the proposal portion of this study, one member from my committee asked me to explain how I would prevent or deal with researcher bias. I asked him to clarify since I thought I had made it clear of the advantages and disadvantages of my insider/outsider researcher positionality. He asked how I would deal with my positive personal perceptions of the participants I was working with. In response, I admitted that I was indeed exceedingly biased. I was in these teachers' corners 110%, massaging their soldiers and cheering them from the sidelines. It was suggested that I add additional participants to my study whom I had no past personal or professional relationships with-- enter Ruth and Dian. However, I have to admit, after only an initial meeting, they had me, and I was in their corners too. These women are teachers, and as a past teacher myself, I have a connection with them that is more profound than I can adequately articulate. I know the sweat, tears, time, family and financial sacrifices they make in order to fulfill the responsibilities of their chosen profession. Are these teachers perfect? No, of course not. Did I witness imperfect lessons? Absolutely.

Teachers are well groomed to understand that there is no such thing as a perfect teacher or perfect lesson. At a district professional development meeting I attended my second year on the newly implemented teacher evaluation system, we were told by the district coach that we could visit the top of the rubric, but we would never live there-- a great boost for the morale. I intentionally did not focus on these "imperfections." There is enough of that from the public, policymakers, and even administrators. Had I witnessed

or heard grave incongruencies with the teaching practice, of course these instances or conversations would have been seen in my data. But I did not. Instead I heard from these participants' mouths and observed through their methods the devotion and honor they hold to their professional career, and most importantly, their students.

Participant sample.

For this study, I only worked with and collected data from four participants. In the research field, this sample size may be considered small and insignificant, especially in a quantitative methodology. In qualitative research, sample sizes are advised to meet saturation--when no new responses are forthcoming. However, narrative inquiry works a bit differently. Since narrative inquiry deals with data in the form of stories, there is no such thing as saturation. No two people share identical histories, experiences, and perspectives and therefore every story from every person is original and new. There are no rules, it is ambiguous, and not straightforward on how many stories should be collected (Patton, 2002).

This decision is largely based off the research questions, the framework, resources, time constrictions, and scope of the research project. The objective of this research study was to collect depth and not breadth. It was important for me to highlight my participants as people with individual meaning and significance and not just as a number. For this objective, four participants deemed appropriate and reaped hundreds more pages of data than can be recounted here.

Another thing worth noting about my participant sample is that it was made up of white (or physically appearing white) females. While this participant sample is consistent

with the majority demographic of secondary teachers in the United States and Arizona, it certainly comes with its own privileges and circumstances. According to Kohli (2018), teachers of color are underrepresented and have higher attrition rates than Caucasian teachers. Kohli concludes that a contributing factor to this dilemma is that urban schools (which VHS and EMHS are) are largely considered hostile racial climates, despite serving a minority-majority student population. “Color blindness and racial microaggressions” add to the already burdened teacher load, even more stressors to account for. These factors can contribute to a teachers of color pushout. The participants in this study are not affected by this issue nor reported any instances of feeling hostility in their environments from peers, superiors, or students as a result of racial or ethnic factors (with the exception of Dian who reported receiving some criticism for choosing to wear the Native American feather on her graduation cap in solidarity with her students). Additionally, male teachers have been found to have slightly higher attrition than female teachers (Gray & Taie, 2015).

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I will share a moment that, you know, one of those "it's not always rainbows" moments. Last year when our president got elected, he immediately stopped the DACA program. And there was some debate whether or not he was going to do that. But I remember he was elected in November, and then by February, he had said no more...One of the days when I was doing writing conferences-- and I hadn't really thought about it, like I knew in the news that it was coming up that this decision was coming up but I didn't necessarily think it was that day--this student came up and she sat down in the chair that you're sitting in now. She asked if she could keep her phone, she said I'm expecting a text. And we had previously said if there's something really important then you can keep your phone out, just let me know beforehand. So, she did that, followed the rules. I was like okay, so she put her phone aside, and you know we're talking. And then she looks over at her phone. And I saw her future die in her eyes...I knew immediately what it was. I knew immediately... I told her, let's let's go out in the hall. She was just completely upset. So, I went out and grabbed the tissues and went out and talked to her and I said, "You know just know that I'm going to do everything I can for you...keep working hard and I'll do everything I can for you. But I can't make any promises. I can't promise what your future is." ...She eventually...got her emotions under control and she went back in the classroom. She's one of my best students.

A few months later we had the counselors come in because they want to make sure that the seniors are doing their FASFAs for and they had us as teachers pass out like a, "What are you going to do? What college are you going to go to? Are you going into the military?" These things are not available for DACA students. The two words she wrote was "I can't." ... It's not like I'd forgotten but we had had that conversation a few months ago. And then when I saw that on her paper I had to step out. You know. So that's one of the things that motivates me as a teacher, as an activist, as a person. I will never forget that for the rest of my life. We have taken somebody's future and just cut it off. - Ruth, Interview 2

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CHAPTER 4

RESTORYING THE DATA

"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." -John Dewey

Structural Analysis: Telling the Stories

A component of narrative inquiry that deviates from other qualitative research methods is an important stage in data analysis where there is less of a search for the answers to the question and more allowance for the stories themselves to inform the conclusions. The process requires that I focus on the stories as the primary unit of analysis (Estefan et al., 2016). My job as a researcher in this part of the analysis is to act as more of a gatherer, collector, and gallery for the data rather than a curator--only displaying information that may reveal what I've decided is valuable and may show what I hope to discover. Instead, in this chapter, I present the stories as they were presented to me in narrative form for several reasons: 1. to deliver the stories in a form that maintains the intact integrity of the accounts; 2. to illuminate the participants as people and not just study subjects; and 3. to allow others besides myself to glean meaning and make their own conclusions.

Structural analysis is sometimes referred to the way the story is told rather than a focus on the content itself (Riessman, 2008). However, structural analysis can also emphasize the retelling of the stories, or restorying, of the narratives gathered in a more synthesized and chronological approach than it was originally delivered (Creswell, 2012). While the interaction/continuity section may look like the raw data of our interviews, it is in fact the "re-storied" version that I have consolidated and recounted. Nevertheless, as is

necessary for narrative inquiry, each draft segment was given to the participants to review and verify for accuracy. Additionally, structural analysis can work to highlight the three-dimensional space narrative-structure as developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) with focus on interaction, continuity, and situation/ place. This restorying of the narratives allows for in-depth descriptions and profiles to be composed of the four participating teachers in this study and their personal and social stances (interaction). This section also allows for discussion of the participants' surroundings and environment (situation/ place).

Lastly, the stories will be recounted in an effort to pay attention to the chronological events of the participants' teaching experiences: past, present, and future (continuity). This structure works nicely with the modified three-part interview structure that was used for collecting the majority of the narrative data. The two conducted interviews were broken into a total of three sections: How did you get here (past), what is it like being you (present), what does it mean to be you (future/ reflection)? (Seidman, 2009). I will present the narratives of these four teachers in that order as well, side by side, so that their stories may be presented in a continual thread that parallels each others' accounts.

Situation/ Place

East Meadow High School

East Meadow High School (EMHS) is one of the older high schools in the largest public-school district in the state of Arizona, established in 1962 with a current enrollment of over 3,200 students. While the school is almost 60 years old, the facade is

far from unkempt. My first strolls through EMHS were through a well-maintained office, a newer-looking exterior of the main buildings promoting the school colors and mascot, and manicured lawns covered by canvas awnings providing shade to the students from the desert sun. While Dian and Ruth both spoke to the school having its downfalls as a result of age (unreliable air conditioning, thin walls), they also commend the school for putting in the work that it has done to be presented as a comfortable environment that was first in the district to adopt one-to-one technology for the students. The English classrooms are located in one of the oldest buildings, and while the desks appear newer and furniture seems to be functioning, the rooms are lacking windows and a fresh coat of paint.

EMHS works hard to meet the challenges that are common in an urban lower-income community by adopting programs like AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) which has an emphasis on preparing first-generation-college students. Additionally, EMHS is notably recognized for its strong International Baccalaureate (IB) program, one of the only ones in the district. I was also struck by Ruth and Dian's constant descriptions of the strong sense of community and camaraderie between their colleagues, mentioning their co-workers as their best friends who are there to stand at the side of hospital beds or socialize on Friday nights. In the 2018-19 school year a new administration was established, yet Dian and Ruth also emphasized the support and trust they felt from administration, old and new. When they discussed their students, the challenges of a minority-majority low-income school didn't come up. Instead, they praised the diverse and individual nature of their students and the experiences they

brought to the classroom. Nevertheless, in 2018, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) assigned a "D" letter grade to the school. According to ADE:

> The system measures year to year student academic growth, proficiency on English language arts, math and science, the proficiency and academic growth of English language learners. . . and that high school students are ready to succeed in a career or higher education and high school graduation rates. (Arizona State Board of Education)

While letter grades hold a strong note of skepticism from teachers and those in education-- whether it's really fair to compare selective charter schools and high-income communities to their counterparts-- it's still a stamp the school is required to wear. A scarlet "D" that the teachers are constantly reminded of by the state and community.

Valley High School

When I moved away from my college town to Arizona, Valley High School (VHS) became my home. I remember going in for my interview (with my mom sitting in the lobby as my driving companion from her home two hours away), and being excited about the prospect of teaching at such a large high school. Serving over 3,500 students, the campus sprawls along several blocks dotted by academic buildings, courtyards, and sports fields. When the principal called me 15 minutes after the interview and left a message on my phone extending the job offer, I was thrilled. That message remained saved on my phone for years after. Once starting at VHS, I was introduced to a culture and tradition that comes with a high school history that is over 100 years old. The first VHS classes were held on the top floor of a brick elementary school in 1899. In 1908

construction began on the original building that came to be known as "Old Main," originally housing 12 classrooms. I learned this history as I attended the beginning of the year Traditions Assembly with my sophomore English class, an assembly that is held at VHS annually for all students.

I learned that in 1932 a male student was accidentally killed when his shotgun misfired in an attempt to break up a dog fight, and in his final words he said he didn't think he'd make the football game that night but "tell coach and the boys to carry on." The phrase "carry on" now lives as the school's motto. The Traditions Assembly continues to tell the story of how a lab fire wreaked havoc in 1967 and burned Old Main to the ground. In 1972, a new building was constructed at a different location, where VHS stands today. Finally, at the conclusion of this assembly, students stand and grasp each others' backs swaying back and forth singing the hymn-like Alma Mater, "Carry On."

As a graduate from a five-year-old high school, I found the history and tradition surrounding VHS captivating. As a transplant in a new town, this was a legacy I was now a part of. However, I also noticed that my classroom desks seemed to be the originals from the 1972 construction (proven by a carving "class of '78" on one wooden desk with burnt-orange chair attachment). I was also astonished by the hordes of trash that littered the campus grounds, and the giant cobweb in the outdoor stone stairway that seemed to expand every summer (I'd leave at the end of each year thinking this would be the summer the custodial staff would clear that web, it never was).

The yearbooks of VHS show a story of a community that was once fairly homogeneous and suburban, and how it evolved into a very different urban climate serving students from many different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds--similar to EMHS which is located only a few miles away. During one of my first years teaching at VHS, I remember a veteran teacher making a statement that the students may have different backgrounds and needs than they did 20 years ago, but they would go through a wall for their teachers if it was needed. I found this to be true. Many of the students may not have completed their homework assignments, but I was fairly certain they'd take a bullet in my place.

During my four years at VHS, the school also went through three different administrative overhauls. The most recent entered at my departure and remains there today, three years later. The year or two following when I continued to sub at VHS or supervise student-teachers, I still recognized a handful of the office staff. However, walking through this past year on my way to meet with Callie or Amanda, almost not a single face seemed familiar. Callie, particularly, spoke about the impact that administrative overturn has made on the school culture. With a new leadership learning what is needed and having distant personal investment in the history of the school's tradition, the climate transfers to the students as well. Callie and Amanda also hinted at a fragmented staff that tends to keep to themselves, or content-similar neighbors.

My recent visits were also met by school improvements such as an overhauled courtyard with new astroturf, trash-free benches, and large shiny signs hanging from buildings promoting school spirit and community. Many of the campus bathrooms were

also recently upgraded and the school followed EMHS by adopting the one-to-one technology accessibility for students. VHS also prepares students through the AVID program, becoming the district's first AVID National Demonstration School--a large achievement that the school works hard to maintain and requalify for every year. VHS was awarded a "C" letter grade in 2018.

Interaction and Continuity

How Did You Get Here?

Dian (EMHS), an introduction.

Dian is a tall, striking woman with long mahogany hair who stands with square shoulders and an erect posture. I first met Dian in the spring of 2018 when I learned that she taught a Native-American Literature course at EMHS. I thought this class would be a great venue for a small research paper I was working on at the time. Dian was eager to try something new and was charismatic and friendly with me from the start. However, only a few weeks after we made our plans to try out a few activities for her classroom, the 2018 Arizona Teacher Walkout spurred by the #RedforEd movement took place, making Dian's course schedule too tight to complete the planned study. I didn't meet with Dian again until almost six months later when I reached out to her as a potential participant for this study. Again, she was happy to help.

During my first observation of Dian's classroom, she wore a flowy black and blue floral dress over black tights, with a shiny black belt pinched at the waist. Her long hair was pulled back into a low bun at the nape of her neck. When the beginning of class bell rang, Dian called out to her students, "OK little love muffins! Homework is due. If you

have it, turn it in. It's that simple." This first statement automatically cued me to the realization that Dian isn't your ordinary teacher. Her interactions with her students is one to be admired.

Dian's classroom is a rectangle with no windows. Whiteboards line the south and west walls, and desks are positioned along the east and west walls facing in. T-shirts hang at the back promoting pinned racing tags. Other walls are covered with posters, college banners, several dream catchers, a sombrero, and student work. Her desk, where I sat, had a strong scent of vanilla. Additionally, there is a large motif of "Wonder Woman" strewn throughout the classroom, in fact, the placard at the entrance of Dian's classroom in the outside hall displays her name and then a slash followed by Wonder Woman. Dian has been in this classroom for 21 years, the entire duration of her teaching career.

In our first interview I asked Dian (and all the participants) to bring with them a sort of concept map in which they illustrated their teaching journey (as seen below in figure 4). Dian's clearly reflected the time and attention she took to completing this task with colorful images and intentional layout. In the center of her map it states, "How I became an East Meadow Wonder Woman." The following description is a condensed version of Dian's teaching journey, how she came to be where she is, in her own words with slight edits and restoried by me in order to accurately transfer her oral story to a chronological written one.

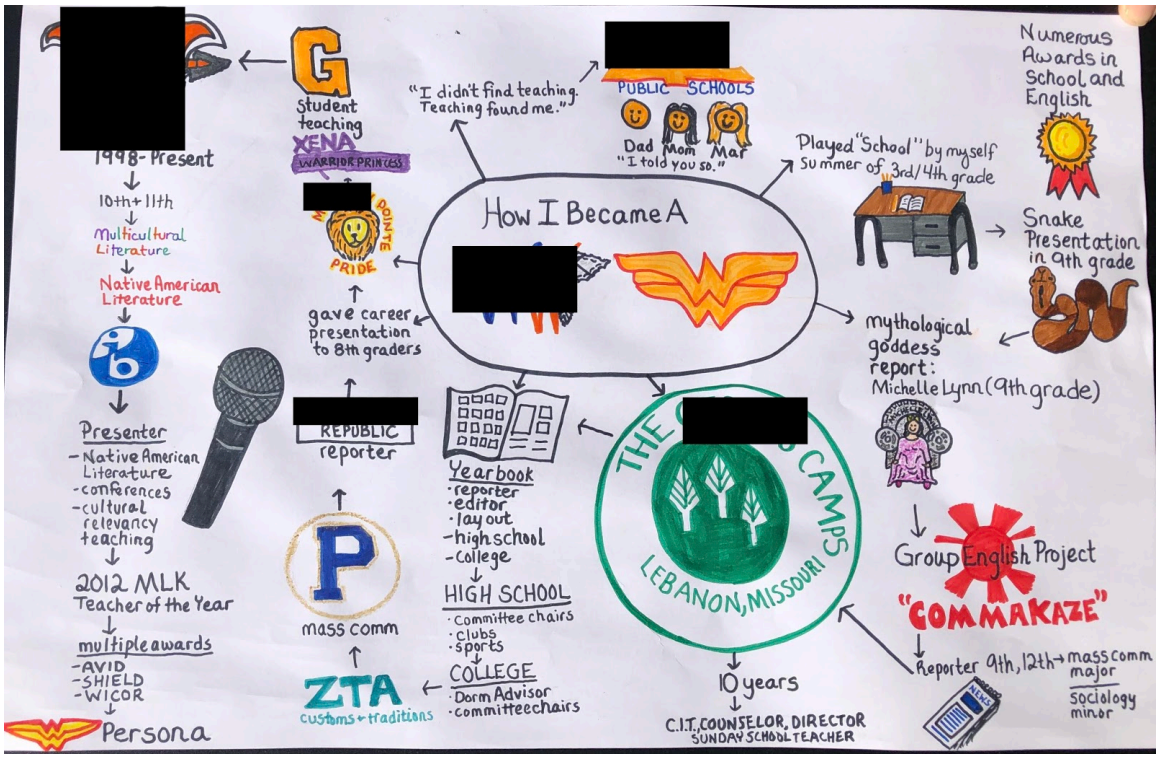

Figure 4. Dian's "teacher journey" concept map.

Dian, in her words.

I started off with the question of, how do I even want to introduce this? You know, what do I want the theme to be? So, the theme for me is how I became an East Meadow Wonder Woman. And I tell everybody who asks, I didn't find teaching, it found me. I never in a million years thought I would ever be a teacher. Not that I didn't love it but just I wanted so desperately to be a world-renowned reporter. I'm a Christian Scientist. We have our own newspaper called The Christian Science Monitor, and I wanted to work for them. I wanted to travel the world through Christian Science Monitor. That was my ultimate goal. And it just didn't happen that way. But then again when I process this journey, I realize I've been preparing for teaching my whole life. I had no idea.

My whole family taught through the ------ public school district. So, when I became a teacher, I got the biggest “I told you so” from all of them. One of the things that I remember was how in third grade I played school all by myself because I didn't want to lose anything that I had been taught. And so, I set up my little desk in my room and I remember being excited about being both the teacher and the student.

I also was a camp counselor for 10 years starting as early as the ninth grade. I was a counselor for kids that were only a year younger than me but even then, I loved being there for them. So, this was a huge part of my life. I also attended a Christian Science boarding school for my junior and senior years of high school. I remember in 11th grade when I moved over to the boarding school I was in an English group for different projects and they called me the comma-kaze because I would always correct the papers and tell them they were missing their commas. In high school and college I was also on yearbook and was a reporter and editor. I didn’t necessarily intentionally want positions of authority, but I was in them a lot. I was a committee chair for a lot of clubs, involved in a lot of sports, not for the power, but because I enjoyed helping others.

When I graduated from high school, I came to Arizona for my first two years of college majoring in journalism. However, at such a large school I felt so lonely, having just come from a small high school. Yet, even then, I remember an English professor grading one of my reports and telling me it was one of the best he’d ever read. I then transferred to the Christian Science College for my junior and senior year. I ended up majoring in mass communications and minoring in sociology because humans just fascinate me. And every summer I would go back to the camp as a counselor, and

eventually I was the director of a program, and every Sunday I was a Sunday school teacher. That was probably the most influential of all of my teaching.

After college I had secured a job at a local paper because of recognition from a contest I had won from one of my mass comm classes. They liked my first line of an Easter feature article I had written about one of the mall costumed Easter bunnies; it started off with something like: “When Bill Brandon dons his work suit, he has to check it for fur balls first.” However, living arrangements to stay in that state for that job didn’t work out, so I came home to Arizona and got a job at a large newspaper. It wasn’t my first choice, but it’s where life took me. But again, all of it prepared me for this [teaching]. It’s all just a part of the journey.

So, I worked for several years as a feature reporter. I loved writing and learning new things, but I realized that the characteristics of reporters, at least where I was, was not at all what I expected. I was miserable. It was during that time that my friend who was a teacher asked me to come into his classroom and do a presentation for career day. And I absolutely loved it and realized that this is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. So, while I was still working as a reporter, on the side, I became a career counselor for a school. I did this for several years while I was getting my post-bac to attain my teaching license. I worked with the hardest kids at this school but realized they were just misunderstood. They had really bad lives, and I have an affinity for the hard cases. When I get them one-on-one, I realize that they are just the sweetest kids, that they are absolutely delightful. I love them.

So from there I did my student teaching at ---- High, and this was when Xena the Warrior Princess was really popular. And it just so happens that I wore my hair exactly like her; I had the bangs and straight hair. So, my kids in every class would not leave when the bell rang unless I did the Xena yell, and my mentor teacher was in on it. My second to last day there, one of the kids gave me a present; it was handmade Xena outfit, and I was told by the students and my mentor teacher that I had to wear it the next day. It fit me to a tee. That next day there was a fire drill, so there I was, holding a bouquet of balloons given to me by a student, in my Xena costume, on the field for the entire school to see. I loved it there.

I finished my student teaching during the fall semester, so then I subbed around the district and got notice that East Meadow was looking for a teacher. At first, I was hesitant--East Meadow was the rival of the high school I attended my first two years of high school, and it also had a reputation for being the "ghetto" school. So, I thought, OK, I'll dip my feet at EMHS and then go back to ---- High School when they have an opening. I remember having some weird questions during the interview, like how I handled adversity, when I had been expecting pedagogical questions. I got hired on the spot.

After I was hired, I realized I was replacing a teacher who was truly awful. He literally dropped his keys on the secretary's desk one day and just walked out. He hated the kids. When I first walked into the classroom, where I am now, the room just had a feeling like somebody died. There was nothing on the walls except one poster that said, "no sniveling". There was a small piece of butcher paper pinned to the cork board with a

“fuck you” on it-- I mean it was just awful. On his desk was a stack of papers that I guess was the last assignment for the kids to write a five-paragraph essay about their Christmas wishes. I sat there and read these papers, and just started crying. These kids were writing, “I wish my mom didn’t have cancer,” “I wish my dad hadn’t gotten deported,” “I wish my brother wasn’t in jail.” I mean, it was just heartbreaking. And the previous teacher had written a big fat “F” on every single paper with no other marks.

So, I tried to undo everything that he had done. As soon as my kids set foot in my classroom, I just fell in love with them. At the very end of the year, I was given several offers at other schools including ---- High School, where I had done my student teaching. But I was like, “Hell no, I’m staying.” And I’ve never looked back. I wanted to stay for the kids. While I loved the other school, at the end of the day, they said “bye,” and that was it. But my kids at EMHS don’t want to leave the classroom. They don’t want to go home. You are literally everything for them. You’re their mother, their mentor, their cheerleader, their chef.

Since being here I’ve gotten to teach Native American Literature and Multicultural Literature, and my teaching style and who I am just works perfectly for those classes. We get to talk about the hard things that most of my colleagues don’t want to touch. So, coming full circle, one day during a Multicultural Literature class, I was doing an activity where I had the kids going through their memories. I turned off the lights and asked them to visualize their childhoods, specifically asking them to recount certain memories. At the end, they’re all crying, and I tell them that I’m going to turn on

the lights and they can write whatever they need to write about, and eventually that will become a writing piece.

So, I have these students with snot coming out of their noses, and they're crying, writing away, and one of my colleagues comes in and sees this. And she's just like, "What the hell is going on? You're my Wonder Woman." And it just stuck. Ever since then, co-workers and students just keep buying me Wonder Woman stuff. I have so much Wonder Woman crap it's not even funny. It's just become my persona. And so, that's my journey of how I became an East Meadow Wonder Woman.

Ruth (EMHS), an introduction.

Ruth became one of my participants through my connection with Dian. Unfamiliar with the English faculty at EMHS, and knowing Dian was a respected veteran teacher in the department, I trusted her assistance with finding another English teacher for the study. My first request for Dian was to ask around the department to see who would be willing. Dian reported back with a couple names. I then gave Dian the criteria of someone who would perhaps offer a distinct voice and interesting thoughts/ opinions. Dian said both teachers would be great, but singled out Ruth as the frontrunner. Ruth was extremely responsive to my initial emails and seemed eager to be involved, and that was enough for me.

I officially met with Ruth about the study before any of my other participants since she was the only one I had never previously met. At our initial meeting in her classroom one December day after school, I was struck by her bubbly and welcoming personality. Ruth was dressed casually and comfortably which suits her character. During

my first classroom observation she was in embellished jeans and a black hooded sweatshirt half-zipped over a red T-Shirt (the closest garment teachers are allowed to wear to represent their support for the #RedforEd movement). Her short pale hair featured light purple streaks. Ruth is only a year younger than Dian at 46.

Ruth's classroom also reflects her quirky personality and fun interests displaying Harry Potter, Star Wars, and other fantasy character posters. A Princess Leia silhouette sits in one frame with the words "A Woman's Place is in the Resistance." Student artwork takes up an entire wall.

During our first meeting as I attempted to explain to Ruth my half-conceived study idea, a past female student wandered into the room in which Ruth immediately stood up from her chair to give her a hug. The student spoke about her time at the alternative high school where she was currently earning credit recovery, and her desires to graduate in May. Ruth was extremely affirming. "I'll be back with a diploma," said the student as she left the room.

"I never remember their names," Ruth confided in me once the student left.

"But you remember where they sat," I supplied, knowing the feeling.

"Exactly! She sat right there," pointing to the corner.

Ruth then told me that one of the things she loves most about teaching is when the students come back to share their little successes. "You can't talk to me for more than five minutes without knowing I'm a teacher." Yet, Ruth wasn't always a teacher. In fact, teaching was more like a third career after a fairly different path. Ruth has been a teacher for 13 years, 10 at East Meadow.

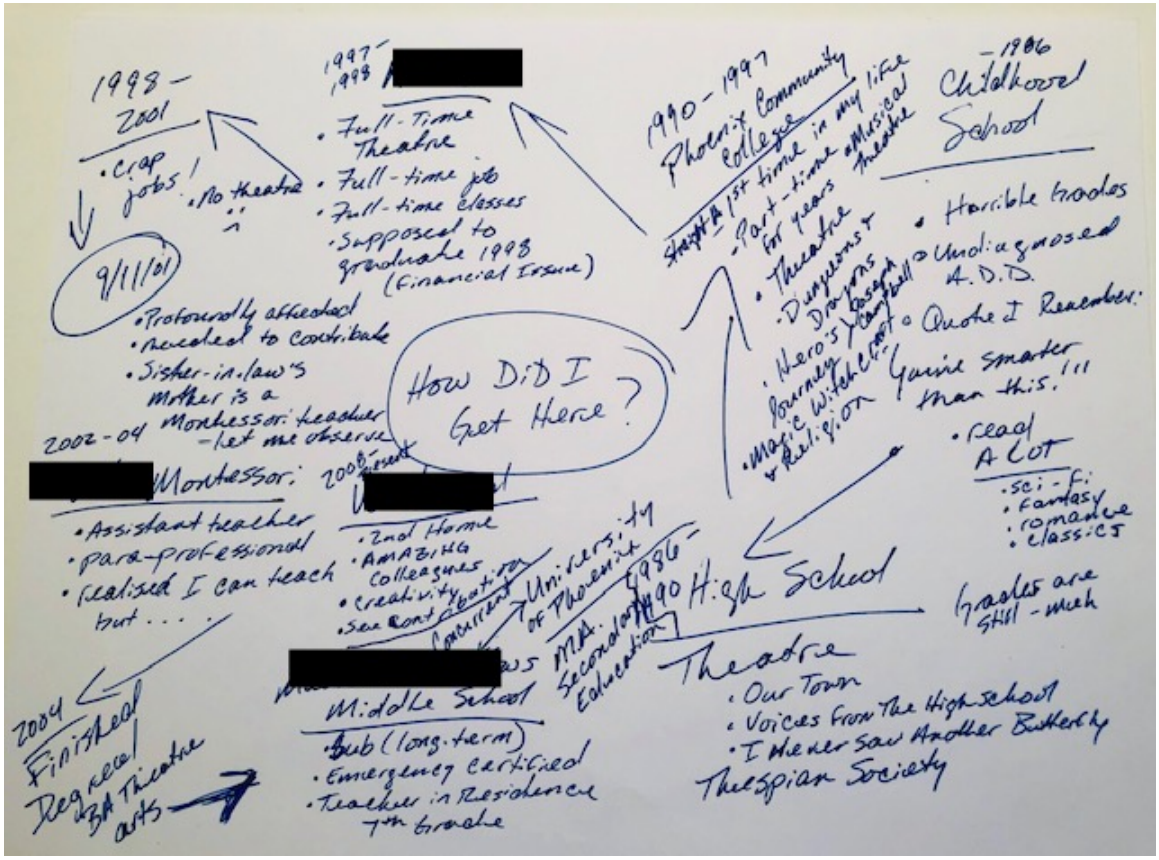

Figure 5. Ruth's "teacher journey" concept map.

Ruth, in her words.

Both of my parents were really big readers and so it became something that I loved to do as well. I would read all sorts of books. When I was in middle school, I started reading historical romances like my mom, and I always read horror as well. I made friends with the librarian at our school and she would just give me all of these recommendations. Then when I was in middle school my dad didn't like me reading romances because they had sex, but he was like, "I can't stop you from reading romance, but here's the deal, for every romance book you read, you have to read a classic book."

So, then I started reading things like *Walden, Watership Down*, *Animal Farm,* all outside of school. I was the kid who would have the book I was currently reading on my own time slipped inside the cover of the book we were supposed to be reading for school.

But I hated writing, it was a really lonely and isolating process for me. In fact, I got horrible grades when I was young. I was analyzed for all these learning disabilities in elementary school, but was misdiagnosed as having no issues. Since then, better testing has come out for ADD in girls and a type of math dyslexia that I have, but for the rest of my life, my parents would say, "you're smarter than this, you're just being lazy." I didn't do homework because it would take me hours and hours. I would sit at the kitchen table just crying. It got a little better as I got older, I always made friends with the English teachers because I read so much. I remember my Freshman year of high school, loving the Odyssey and mythology. Our teacher didn't pull any punches, she told us about how this god slept with that god, it was like a soap opera to me. But if you told ten-year-old me that I'd be a teacher, I'd be like, "What are you smoking?"

I played school when I was little, and I liked my teachers, and I liked the environment of school, but I just felt stupid. Like, I just couldn't. But in high school I became involved in theater and joined the Thespian Society, so when I wasn't reading, I was hanging out with the theater. In college I majored in theater, but I ended up not graduating. I just stopped going for a long time. I wasn't able to re-up my financial aid and so I had no money and then the three classes I needed to finish just became unattainable. I ended up working for a computer store for a long time and working in theaters, acting, directing, stage managing. I feel like my theater experience made my

transition to teaching easier; I've been in front of 300 people and made mistakes, so anything a teenager tells me, isn't going to faze me. In fact, I tell all my students to take a theater class, and not 101 or History of Theater, but a class where they are actually acting. Because, it's a mindset.

But, after 9/11 happened, this idea popped into my head and I don't think it was an uncommon idea; I felt like if I had a building drop on my head and I died, I would have no legacy. I was twenty-nine years old. I had no kids. I mean, I have a family, but I had no legacy. The reason that I had gotten into theater was because I wanted to change the world and I thought I could do that through art. But by that time I was working in jobs that I didn't like to pay the bills, and those jobs prevented me from doing theater because I was working so much. I felt like there was an artistic deficit. And so, I thought, well if I have to work in order to do theater but I can't do theater because I'm working too much, then I have to find a job where I feel like I can contribute to society.

My sister-in-law's mother was a Montessori teacher and she let me come in and observe her classroom. I was initially very against the idea of teaching in a public school because my uncle was a public-school teacher, and growing up, he would always rant about his job. He taught fifth grade, and when I'd ask him about his job he'd say, "don't do it." He'd talk about how it was a lot of work for very little pay, how politicians didn't respect teachers and many decisions were out of teachers' control. He worked a second job to support his family, and this was in the eighties when teachers were paid a little more decently. But it turns out that I felt compelled to do it, and I would just suffer through it. His daughter became a teacher as well.

After observing my sister-in-law's mother at the Montessori school, I eventually became hired as an aide. But I quickly learned that I wasn't an aide, that I was a bad assistant. I wanted to teach. I talked to the administration about becoming a teacher, but it was a small charter school that had limited openings. Another teacher friend then recommended that I sub, but I had to finish my bachelor's degree first. So, I took three summer school classes and finished in 2004. My friend then went on maternity leave, so I worked as a long-term sub for her computer class since I had computer experience from my previous job. I then began to work in some positions with SPED students and other jobs that became available. Eventually another position came available at a middle school where they wanted me to take over the course for the rest of the year, so I had to become emergency certified by getting my master's degree. It took me 14 years to complete my bachelor's and 15 months to get my master's. It was intense. But I remember other teachers helping me in the process.

I ended up getting certified in English because of my theater background and love of reading, it just seemed like the most natural transition. And even though I didn't like writing, by that time I had figured out how to do it. I became the teacher of record for that seventh-grade course, but the following year there were budget cuts and they could only keep one seventh grade English teacher. I wasn't the one. I put my resume out all over the place, and received a call from East Meadow. The interview was over an hour, and I remember being honest; I didn't get the best grades in school and I hadn't wanted to be a teacher my whole life. However, those experiences, I think, make me a better teacher

because I know what the kids are going through. I know the kids who don't want to be there. I was one of them.

Going to East Meadow was like being shot out of a cannon. It took me a while. Eventually I learned to stop trying to be the teacher that I thought I should be, and be the teacher that I am.

Callie (VHS), an introduction.

At the very early stages of this research study, when I began planning to recruit participants, Callie was on my list. Callie began teaching at VHS a semester before me, and was there during the four years of my tenure. We taught similar courses, have some similar background experiences, but she stayed at VHS while I chose to leave. In a way, I think of Callie as an example of my personal alternative path: the "what if" had I chosen to stay in the field as a full-time high school teacher.

Nevertheless, our ages (31), roles as mothers and wives, religion, and English teaching degrees are about where our similarities end. Callie is dynamic. She is the epitome of the young, "cool" teacher, with short choppy blonde hair, black rimmed rectangular glasses, skinny jeans, black sneakers with green soles, and T-shirts sporting different pop culture characters or phrases. Since Callie's beginning at VHS, she has taken on significant roles within the school from Link Crew (A freshman mentoring program) and student government advisor, to AVID teacher. Callie is the teacher who plays guitar--and plays it well-- at the student talent show, prepares for months on her next Comicon costume, and tells jokes that cause people to actually laugh.

During my first classroom observation of Callie I was asked by the front office secretary if I needed directions to her room. I swatted away the notion that I would need help knowing my way around. Turns out, when I sauntered up to the door where Callie had resided my whole time at VHS, another teacher's name was on the door. After finally finding her new home in the far east portables, I realized other than location and decrepit desks, not a whole lot had changed about Callie's classroom. Her classroom reflects a student-centered environment where desks face inwards to promote student discussion. The walls are entirely covered with barely an inch of cork board or beige drywall peeping through: student graduation announcements, prom pictures, movie posters, Harry Potter and superhero paraphernalia, an entire wall of student and club event pictures, and a back bulletin board dedicated to a fellow VHS teacher and friend who had been murdered only a few years earlier.

Callie presents herself in the classroom with the energy of a new teacher but the rigor and wherewithal of a veteran even though she has only been teaching for seven years.

"You're doing your whole thing on teacher retention right?" Callie said to me, stopping by my back corner of the classroom during that first observation as her students began to work on an activity.

"That's right," I confirmed.

"That's funny because I'm like, actively looking right now into getting another job."

Turns out, that maybe our paths aren't so different after all. Perhaps my alternative route would have led me to the same place, just three years later.

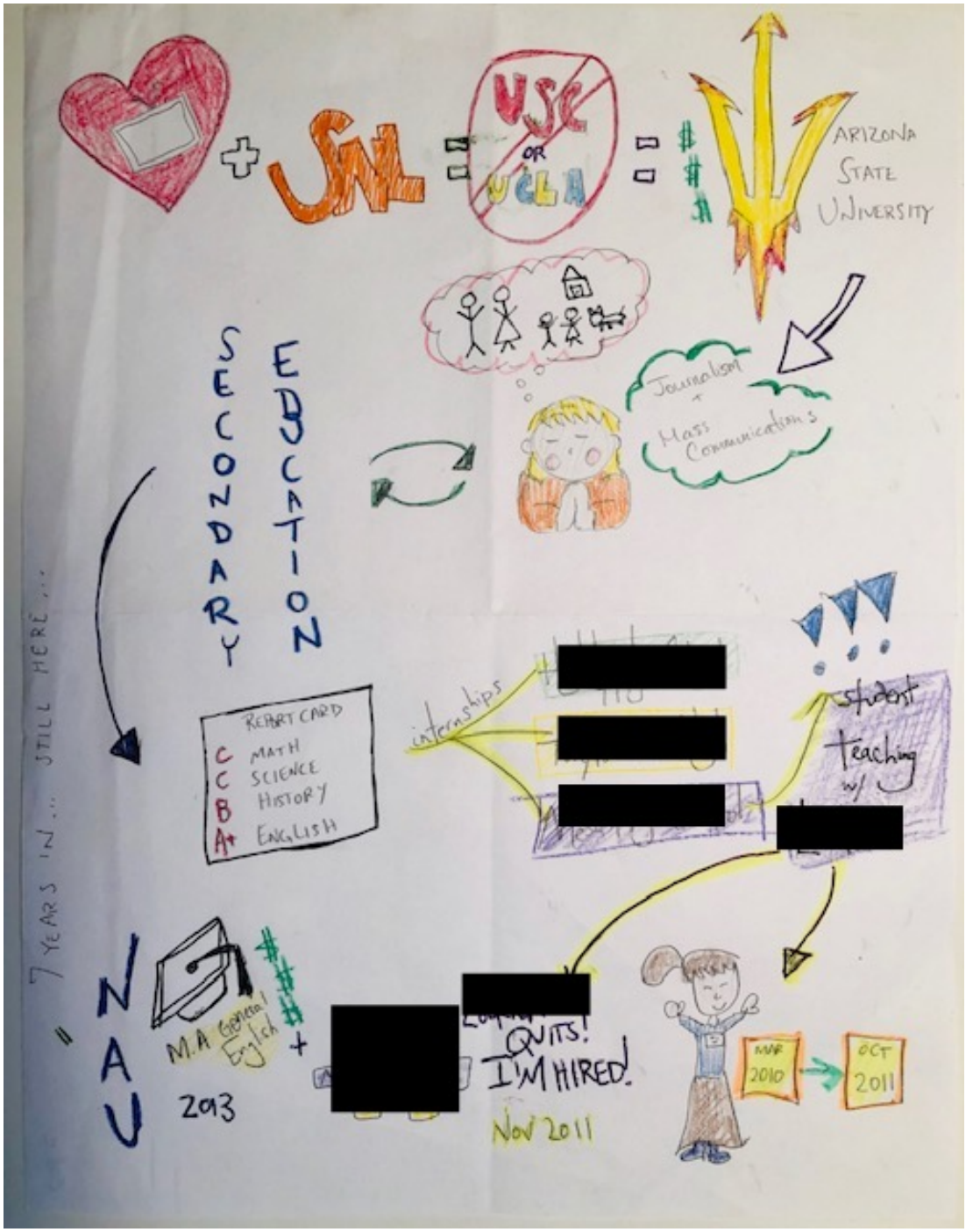

Figure 6. Callie's "teacher journey" concept map.

Callie, in her words.

When I was a kid, my parents would read to me all the time. I remember always going to the library and always having different books. When I was five years old my dad quit reading me bedtime stories and said that if I wanted to read a bedtime story then I had to read them to him so I would learn how to read. I was reading before I went to kindergarten. I really liked reading when I was younger, but as I think happens with a lot of high school students, the enjoyment kind of went away. The only assigned text I remember reading was *To Kill a Mockingbird.* But I did write a lot of fan fiction in high school. I ran message boards and websites or fan fiction sites for things like the X-Files and Passions which was a dumb soap opera that existed. I read a lot of fan fiction too. That was pretty much my first foray into writing.

I also don't remember ever hating school, in fact, in elementary school, I liked it a lot. As I got older, while I became more apathetic towards it, I never had distinct negative feelings towards it. I was really social and liked being with my friends. I also got easy As and it never felt hard for me. As a teacher, that was one of the hardest things was learning how to relate to students who struggle because I was just one of those kids who was good at school. I liked learning and talking, it gave me a voice. I didn't love every subject, math was the worst, but I could sit through it for 45 minutes and then go to English or history.

The only C I ever got was in physics. I remember that made no sense to me, it might as well have been Japanese. But in everything else, I was able to easily get As and Bs. English class was the one I always looked forward to. I mean, sometimes I slept

through it, but I always got As; it was easy for me. I remember in seventh grade I got an end of the year award for English. The English teacher couldn't say enough positive things about me and would always talk about my potential. She encouraged me to do this skit that we had done for class in front of the administration; I never had that experience before where a teacher was so invested in my success and proud of my accomplishments. I think that set me on a course in English specifically where I was like, "oh, I got this, I'm good at it," even from seventh grade.

My high school was a little weird because it was this tiny charter school. It was a weird environment because a lot of my teachers didn't have a degree in education, some didn't even have degrees in the subject they were teaching. My Spanish teacher went on a church mission to Argentina and then became a Spanish teacher, that was his whole knowledge. I joke it was kind of a fake school, I kind of walked around the place like, "I can do this, it's easy". I was on the yearbook and got pinned the editor my first year because my pages looked good and I could form a coherent sentence. I was also on student council and started the girls basketball team. I think I was one of four students in our graduating class of forty-five who enrolled in college after our senior year.

In college, I initially became a journalism major because that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to write. I wanted to be a screenwriter. That was me. That was my goal in high school. I wanted to write for something like Saturday Night Live and sitcoms. I first applied to USC and UCLA because they had film schools, but I didn't get in. However, I got into ASU and chose journalism since they didn't have a film school, but I thought that journalism could kind of lead me into the entertainment business still. I thought

maybe if I can't write movies or TV, I'll review movies or TV, or be able to interview actors and things.

However, after the end of my freshman year I got what's called a Patriarchal Blessing in my church which is essentially where God kind of gives you a guide or a path for your life; if you live worthily then here's the promised blessings that God has in store for you. Mine talked a lot about having a family and going on a service mission. I realized that journalism is very competitive and that I was going to have to travel a lot and beat out other people for jobs, and it would be really unstable. After having that religious experience, I figured it wasn't going to be conducive to having a family. I felt like I needed to switch my major to something that would be pretty much guaranteed so that when I graduated with a degree I could walk into a job that would be secure and steady.

In the end, I switched my major to education. We choose things that we're good at, and I was always good at school. I also thought, "OK if I can't be a writer then I can teach other people to write and I can still do things that I enjoy." I had never considered teaching before. One of the reasons I had wanted to get into screenwriting or journalism was because I wanted to be seen and heard and make an impact in some way. I had originally decided on trying to be a screenwriter because the things that had been most impactful in my life were like movies and TV shows in the midst of family turmoil. I'm the youngest of five, my siblings had all moved out when I was a teen, and I was left alone a lot. I was lonely a lot of times.

I became drawn to art, film, and music and these things gave me sanity and total comfort. I wanted to be able to do that for other people. I wanted to be able to create these amazing things that had such an impact in my life. When I realized how difficult and competitive it was going to be, I thought, “Well, what is a job that when you graduate you're going to be guaranteed but you still have that voice you are still able to make an impact on people; where you're able to help people?” That led me to education. How many kids can I potentially influence? Once I thought about it, it was like BOOM! Greenlight! Full speed ahead! This is totally what I'm going to do. I felt really confident about it moving forward and I knew that that's what I wanted to do.

After I finished my student teaching and graduated from college, I went on a church service mission to Jamaica for 18 months. It was crazy, but obviously gave me a ton of teaching experience. While I was on my mission, I didn’t know if I was going to teach when I got home. I had walked away from job opportunities to go on my mission, and I did love writing, so I thought maybe that’s what I’d try to do when I got back. But when I came home, I went on a road trip with my now husband, and I got a call from my mentor teacher I had during my student teaching at Valley High School. She told me that a teacher just quit at VHS and they needed someone tomorrow. I had been home for two weeks; I wasn’t even in Arizona when she called me. She just said, “Get home.” And I was like, “OK, I’m in I guess.” So, I walked into the classroom at VHS and started teaching. I subbed at first while I finished my certification testing, from about November 2011 to January 2012, and then was hired full time. I’ve been there since.

Amanda (VHS), an introduction.

Amanda is another teacher I knew from my time at VHS. A petite woman of 54, mom of two and grandmother to one, Amanda is in better athletic shape than I was at 20 and has a manicured fashion sense that is enviable. One of the first things that struck me about Amanda when I was a newbie at VHS is her sharpness and quick wit. Her delivery of speech is articulate and void of the filler words we all fall accustomed to, her voice is steady, and her knowledge is vast. I can recall plopping down on an orange plastic chair across from Amanda in the department faculty room one afternoon during lunch, sorting through the leftover meal I toted with me, looking at her, and just wondering: how does she do it? Even then, I got the sense that Amanda was a confident and composed veteran teacher who had it together. I, on the other hand, was drowning in a pile of grading with a resonating headache from fourth hour who refused to complete any kind of writing assignment.

"What's the trick?" I asked her--or some iteration--, "to staying in teaching for so long?"

"Well, I've had a lot of breaks," Amanda responded. "And that helped."

I don't remember any other specifics of that conversation that took place probably seven years ago, but it was then that I learned Amanda had left teaching after her second child and worked at a local community college, but decided to come back, took another year off to attend law school on a full scholarship, but again decided to come back. As someone who had taken the LSAT themselves with the intention of going to law school but decided on teaching, I found this fascinating.

On my first classroom observation I was fortunate to find Amanda's classroom where I remembered it. She was in the front of the classroom, displaying a "Quizzeroo" for the students to complete when the bell rang. In over-the-knee black boots, black tights, a flowy black tunic, and silver hoops in her ears, Amanda called her students to attention:

"When I say happy, you say Wednesday--Happy!"

"Wednesday!" the 11th grade AP Language students shouted back.

Amanda's classroom is organized with walls displaying AVID banners (Amanda is the school's AVID coordinator and instructional specialist), movie posters, college banners, and full bookshelves.

Amanda has been teaching all together for 29 years. She was at VHS the first time from 2002 to 2009, then returned in 2012; the same year I began. I remember at the "new teacher" orientation meeting we had at the beginning of the year Amanda talked about how she loved VHS and convinced the principal to give her a VHS honorary diploma. She mentioned that she had taught at other schools, but this was the best. She said that VHS was the happiest place on earth.

[Amanda was unable to complete her concept map]

Amanda, in her words.

The first word that I ever learned to read--which was in first grade because students learned to read much later when I was a child, we were allowed to be children for a while--was S-E-E. I remember watching my first-grade teacher write it on the chalkboard. I love that that was my first word because reading opened up a whole new

world obviously; it allowed me to see. Once I learned to read, I read everything that I could think of to read. I remember having certain books that I would check out again and again and again. Then in junior high I decided that I would read the classics. I remember reading Jane Eyre, and when I finished that, just feeling really well read. I loved writing too, for me, writing was pretty inextricably connected with fiction and creative writing. That passion eventually influenced getting my MFA in creative writing.

I never really did work at school. I did well in English and social studies and to some degree science. I did not do well in math because I needed to work, and I needed to study, and I didn't study. But that wasn't a negative experience; I had a math teacher who was emotionally supportive if not academically helpful. He always said to us, “If you come to class every day, I know that you're going to learn something. So, if you come to class every day, you won't fail.” That was about what I did. However, I do remember doing some projects and putting my heart and soul into them and being rewarded for that, but I only did it because I wanted to.

In high school I was involved in the performing arts and Speech and Debate. I had a number of teachers who made me feel secure and successful as a learner. Teachers made a big impression on me. They were primary in my life. I know to a greater or lesser extent they are in all kids’ lives, but they were a really big deal for me.

In college, I just wanted to have fun. I was productive and a good student, but I also wanted to do what I wanted to do. I majored in English and was involved in performing arts and theater. I got a theater scholarship and thought that I would become either a drama teacher, an English teacher, or a child psychologist. I couldn’t stand the

idea of being a nurse. I thought those were my only options because I was raised with the expectation that I had to get married and have kids. I never really sought any other career as an option. I think if I had, I still would have gone into teaching, but I don't know what that mindset would have been like.

I felt like teaching was what I had to sink my teeth into. But I also remember making that decision really consciously and imagining myself in front of a classroom and feeling really fulfilled by that. I've left teaching a couple of times, I've taken little breaks, but I've always come back to it. I've had the opportunity to leave teaching and I didn't; I chose not to. Outside of college I did interview for a few retail management positions, but I knew nothing about business. They could tell that from the interviews, so I wasn't offered any positions. Which was lucky for me, I can surely say now. By then, I knew I wanted to teach and began a post-bac program to obtain my teaching license. When I completed that and started hunting for jobs, it was January, and back then there wasn't a teaching shortage, so getting a job mid-year was difficult. I was finally hired at a junior high school that took me an hour to drive to and consisted mostly of students from itinerant farm working families.

The students had different levels of preparation, and many of them were very underprepared. They had just had a beloved long-term sub and weren't happy about me coming in. They would call me *weta* which is a derogatory Spanish term for white girl. It was really, really hard. I would go home and cry, and remember seeing the garbage collectors on my street and thinking I would rather have that job than the one I had. But by the end of the year, it got better. They wanted me to plan a trip to Disneyland which

was really funny. I remember being required to teach science, which I was completely unqualified for, and the school had no lab. I brought in a tarantula we named Bart Simpson, and that was our science class. At the end of the semester, it was actually really hard to leave, but I needed to find a job closer to where I lived.

I then taught at Tristan Junior High for three years, then Tristan High for several years, then resigned when I had my second daughter. During that time, I taught at the community college for five years. After that, I came to VHS, then left to go to law school.

The decision to leave had nothing to do with teaching but had to do with my family narrative. My great grandfather was an attorney then several of my cousins and so there was always just this kind of feeling that we were either engineers or lawyers. I just thought that I could be really good at that and it's something I wanted to try. I started applying to law school when I was 27. Later, I applied again and was accepted and offered scholarships to law school when I was 32. In both instances I decided not to go because I loved teaching and because of family concerns. However, when I was 45 my brother passed away, and I had kind of a bucket list epiphany. I decided that I was going to do a thing that I had always planned or thought I might want to do.

I was at a wonderful moment in my teaching. Before I left, the senior students who had been my juniors the year before asked me to speak at Baccalaureate. It was an amazing moment. The students stood at the end with this standing ovation. It was the most glorious exit from a teaching career you could possibly imagine. I did not leave

because I was frustrated and because I didn't want to teach anymore. I left as a way of continuing my life's journey.

However, after a year, I realized that I was already in a place of competency in my teaching that would take years to get to in a new profession. I also realized that working with adults wouldn't be much different than working with teenagers, except all the frustrations I had with teens would be taken more personally when coming from adults and I would feel less appreciated. There also would be so many fewer, if any, of those dynamic, exciting, and stimulating moments of discovery that I had with my students. It would be like working with teenagers but without the offset of the wonderment and the magic of learning. So, I came back.

I was able to come back to the district I had previously been teaching in, but there weren't any positions open at VHS. As a result, I worked at another high school in the district for two years. Finally, I came back to VHS in 2012.

What is it Like Being You?

Dian, in her words.

My day.

I wake up at 5 a.m. every morning and that's my quiet time. People wouldn't know because I cuss like a sailor, but I'm very religious, and I usually spend that time in prayer. I'm just always praying throughout the day. I spend that time particularly on how I can be the best teacher that I can be. I pray for myself, my family, my community, and my classroom. While I'm driving to work, I'm still praying to be the best teacher that day as well as mentally preparing for my lessons that day. Then I make sure my classroom is

ready and that I have my silly joke of the day posted on the board, because the kids get mad when I don't change it.

I always make sure that I have something to make them laugh. When the bell rings, I want to make sure that I'm outside the door greeting the kids to set the tone for the classroom. As soon as they come in, they know automatically that now is our time to do our thing.

During my prep hour, I always work to be at least two weeks ahead as far as my curriculum. I also always like to try and think about the students who stood out to me so can get back to them, or if I saw somebody who was having a bad day, I want to make sure to pull them aside and say, “Hey are you OK? I noticed yesterday….” I also write happy grams to my kids, especially if I know that they had a hard day. I'll make sure that I have it sitting on their desk when they get in.

Lunch is my downtime when I get to hang with my girls in the English office, and we are so obnoxious, but they are my besties. You have to be strong to hang out with us, because we’re more like sisters than anything. We love each other just as passionately as we argue. Then after school, I usually stay until maybe four or five o'clock and then from there I go to The Marketplace to grade for another couple of hours. That's my happy place. I love the energy of it. I'll get my tea and sit outside and grade for hours. That's what truly makes me happy. Whenever the kids turn something in, I'm truly excited to grade it and tell them that I can't wait to read your stuff, and they know that I'm being serious. That's how we get to know each other. We have a dialogue back and forth because I write in the margins. That's our little private conversation. I have a wall of

“fabulosity” so that we can celebrate when they feel good about something. I always try and accentuate the positives with everything.

Often my kids are also at The Marketplace, because they work or hang out there. Whenever they see me, they're so sweet. They come give me great big hugs and it's just nice to be acknowledged by the kids. Past kids will share with me pictures of their babies or their wedding, and it's just so much fun. Then I'll come home and have dinner, watch TV with my cat if my husband is out of town, and go to bed between 9 and 10, wake up and start again. And that's just my life. But I love it. I love my life. It's very structured. It's routine. But I'm also the type of person that will listen to the same song a million times and never get tired of it.

My teaching.

Every day is a good day. It's just those “Aha!” moments that I have with the kids, and I see the light in their eyes, and they're like, “I get it!” And the days we get to laugh in class-- every day is fun. Every day is the best day. A lot of people think I'm Pollyanna in my teaching and that I look at the world through rose colored glasses, but I just love what I do.

I relate to the kids that feel like they don't have a voice, that feel like they don't have a place. The ones that might think, “What does it matter if I'm not even here?” And those are the ones that I just absolutely reach out to and let them know that I notice them. It’s important for me that I have the opportunity to write on their assignment so that we have a kind of intimate dialogue where they can know that they matter. I love those kids. My kids are so funny. I write down in my journal all of the little hilarious snippets that

my kids say, and I'll tell them that if they say something funny and I'm just dying, I will write it down. They then try and get in my journal.

My kids are the reason that I teach. They're the ones that keep me young. They're the ones that keep me coming back every day. All the bullshit regulations that they put on us make me not want to be a teacher, but then I think, “If I quit, who's going to teach these kids?” That makes me sound like I'm stuck up and conceited, but none of the other teachers want to teach multicultural literature, because they know the discussions that we have. I let everybody have a voice at the table. We get into things like illegal immigration, who should be here legally or illegally. We talk about how the Holocaust happened. Could we have another one? These are real issues that the kids need to think about. I tell them, “You guys are the leaders of the future, and I'm just trying to help you to be thinkers, to make a good future for your kids, for yourself, your grandkids.”

I do everything I'm not supposed to. I hug my kids; I kiss them on the top of their heads or on their cheeks. I tell them I love them. I've had kids that won't leave until I give them a hug, and that says a lot about their life. I'm not going to hug my kids for 20 minutes, but I'll give them a quick squeeze and while I'm squeezing them, I’ll whisper in their ear, “You’re so important. I hope you know your worth. I hope you know how much I appreciate you.” They know that I am completely sincere, and if it's going to get me in trouble, I will die on that hill.

Everyday my goal is that I want my kids to learn something new, but my overall teaching philosophy is helping students to find and tell their stories, to ask them, “What is your story?” I would rather have them be able to write down their stories on a piece of

paper than to take their anger and frustration out on themselves or somebody else. My teaching philosophy is just to have them be good people and to find their strengths, to find their leadership skills. At the end of the day, whether or not they can write a good paragraph, I could care less. It's, “Are you a good person when you come out of my class?” That’s what I care about.

Ruth, in her words.

My day.

I live about seven minutes away from work, so I wake up about 20 minutes before I have to leave. It doesn’t take long for me to get ready; I don’t wear makeup or do a whole lot to my hair. I get up, get ready, get in the car, and go to work. Since I live alone, I don’t cook often for myself, so sometimes I’ll grab breakfast on the way. I get to work about right at seven thirty which gives me some time before classes begin. This year is a little different than past years because I have credit recovery as my first few classes and there's not a whole lot I have to prepare for. I have that for three sections and then I have creative writing. While they're working, I check on their progress and then do some planning. I’ll research and make notes for class or I'll look at Hamlet or our next text for my other classes. When I was teaching humanities last semester I’d put on the closed captions on videos and look at philosophy lectures or anything else that would help prepare for class or that might be interesting for students. Then I have my creative writing class fourth hour and then lunch and prep hour. I don't go to the lunchroom as much lately because I have my creative writing class right up against lunch and often I have kids who want to stay in my room and talk. I’ll talk with them and then grab lunch really

quickly. After that is my senior English class that I've prepared for earlier in the day, and then I'll continue to plan after school or grade.

I try to get grading done as soon as possible but I'd rather plan than grade. I guess it's avoidance anxiety. It took me a long time to put a value to their assignments, I mean, what's the difference between effective and mastery? The differences can be so vague. After grading, I'll often do more research for class which leads to a research rabbit hole. Before I know it, I'm reading an article that's completely off topic from where I started, but it's really interesting. Then I go home around five thirty.

Lately I've gotten back into playing Dungeons and Dragons with some friends at a gaming store, which goes along with my passion for storytelling and draws on my theater background, but often I go home and just want to shut my brain off. Even though I have the easiest schedule I've had in my teaching career, teaching is still just a lot of work. I remember another teacher had said that teaching isn't always about the grading or the lesson planning, it's all the kids that you're holding in your head. It's the ones that we file away, where you're thinking about how you can reach that person, or you're worried about them for so many different reasons. I teach seniors, and often at the end of the year they begin to just freak out. I've had students burst into tears. Teaching isn't always about the lesson, it's about the kids. We hold all these kids in our heads, and that takes up our brains.

My teaching.

I love the days when the kids show me that they get it. When I can see that it clicked or when a student offhandedly makes a remark that hearkens back to something

we learned months ago. I had a past student who recently posted something on Facebook about *The Great Gatsby,* and I knew it stemmed from one of my lessons. It's a really good feeling, when I can see an idea bloom from a lesson I created. I know abstractly that I'm in a job where things I do or say will stay with students; we're told that we impact the future, but when we actually witness it, it's pretty sweet.

I also love when a lesson I've created works. I try to be as creative as possible, but it doesn't always go the way I want it to. But when it does, that's a great feeling too. Often, I plan and it all goes out the window. My teaching method is a combination of planning, seat of the pants, and a spark of creativity. When I first started teaching, I felt a bit like I had been shot out of a cannon because I didn't have the formal teacher training. I knew I needed to create lessons, I knew about backwards design, but I felt like I was creating Franken-lessons. It wasn't organic to me.

But I've come a long way. I've never taught the same lesson twice. I'm always looking for new ways to help the students learn the material. Also, I have great colleagues. I am surrounded by amazing professionals who know what I'm going through because they are going through the same thing. We can talk about our lessons and laugh about what happened, and then make suggestions in a way that's not judgmental. That's one of the greatest things about being a teacher. I'm not sure if other jobs have that same kind of collaborative atmosphere in a very non-competitive way. I never feel like somebody is after my job or trying to undermine me or wants me to fail. Teaching is very much a "lift all boats" kind of atmosphere.

I'm also the kind of teacher that won't ask my students to do anything that I'm not willing to do. When I had them write their first story in creative writing, I wrote a story too. It turned out OK, but I didn't like writing it. I was honest with them. I'm also pretty laid back; I don't sweat the small stuff. It's easy for me to connect to the nerds and I love the theater kids. I purposely look for the kids who are on the outside; who don't always get their day in the sun. I look for the LGBTQ kids or the kids who are super quiet; I don't force them to do anything or try to be overbearing, I'll wait for a month or so and then I'll go up to a quiet kid and say, "I want you to talk today." Usually by that time I've established enough trust that they're willing to speak up a little. I have to work a bit harder for the kids who are kind of gruff or rigid, stuck in their opinions. Those are the ones that I see as a challenge and I think "OK, in about a month you're going to change your mind."

I want to create the kind of classroom environment that provides my students a jumping off point. I like to wind them up and watch them go. Sometimes that can be confusing for them and they'll protest that they don't understand, but I like to purposefully challenge them. I'll tell them that I'm doing this on purpose because I'm trying to blow your mind a little bit. Because of the relationships that we've established, they're willing to roll with it. I throw something at them and see what they do. I like to shake up their established philosophy and allow them to see that there are different views out there.

I teach juniors and seniors so I'm always conscious of needing to help this teenager become a whole person. I like to show them that they are going to come across

different views and philosophies and while they don't have to believe them, they have to accept or at least acknowledge that some things may be different from what they think, and they can learn from it.

Literature teaches us empathy. It teaches us that there are different kinds of people. If my kids can empathize with a character and understand what that character is going through, then I've done my job. They might see a character like Hamlet who is going through grief and is depressed, and perhaps they have these feelings as well and this is the first time they've been able to talk about it out loud. That's part of my job. Of course, there is technical writing, and whether or not they can do research and all of that, but I think I can always teach skills. Teaching students to be who they want to be, that's a little harder.

Callie, in her words.

My day.

Generally, I wake up at about six thirty in the morning but often my five year old daughter will come in and snuggle with my husband and me for a bit, which makes it a lot harder to get out of bed. I'm supposed to be at work by 7:30 but sometimes I get there closer to 7:40/45ish. I teach honors sophomore English for the first three periods and then fourth hour is Link Crew which is a nice little break after my English classes because it's a lot less structured with more activities and the kids working on things or the kids teaching each other. We get to do a lot more laid-back stuff in that class. Then I have my lunch hour and prep hour, so I've got this big block in the middle of my day. Sixth hour I

have AVID and then school ends at three o'clock. I try to leave at three thirty when I can, If I can.

Probably about five years ago, I was drowning in work. It was my second year of teaching and I was just drowning. I felt like I lived at school all the time. I was doing student council at the time and I felt like I just lived there. I remember talking to another Valley teacher who's now the AVID director for our district and he said, “Yeah, I never take work home.” I was like, “What, how is that possible?” He said that he made a rule early on in teaching that he would never take work home. That he would do work at work and live his home life at home. I didn’t understand how he functioned. He said that sometimes the kids just get their assignments back later and life would go on.

Since then, I’ve tried to mimic that and maintain that as much as I can and not take work home. I try to leave when my contract time ends so I can go home because I want to spend as much time with my kids as I can. But that's not always the case. It just depends on what's going on. Friday I was here until six. Grading and deadlines force me to stay later. If I miss days because I’m sick, then I get behind and have to stay to catch up. I also have extracurricular activities from Link Crew that I have to chaperone that will keep me late. The other day we worked at a food bank and I didn’t go home until nine.

Whenever I get home, I try to do as little as humanly possible. I let my kids control the show for the next few hours: we’ll watch shows, color, or play in the backyard. I try to just have my kid time. We try to do nothing except focus on the kids until it's time to get ready for bed at about seven thirty. The kids are in bed by eight o'clock and then I go to the gym and I'm at the gym probably until nine thirty or ten. My

husband and I try to carve out time to watch a show and decompress, otherwise we literally can have a week go by and realize that we haven't really talked to each other. Then we go to bed and wake up and do it again. I'm so tired all the time, it's a struggle.

My teaching.

My favorite thing about teaching are the students and just interacting with teenagers. I think part of me is always going to be a teenager at heart. We just have fun. I laugh a lot with my kids. I'm the youngest of five and I never had younger siblings or cousins that I associated with; I'm always used to being around older people. It's just fun being around younger people. They keep me young. We joke around a lot. I like to have a fun environment. I try to emulate those teachers that I liked when I was in school, the ones that actually cared about what was going on in my day and wanted to make their students laugh. The ones that wanted to have fun and make learning not a chore. I hate it when my students come in and talk about other teachers that seem cranky all the time and the students ask me, "Miss, why did so and so get into teaching when they hate kids and they're angry all the time?" I can't wrap my head around that because it's just a lot of fun. Hanging out with the kids and hearing their funny and ridiculous stories is absolutely my favorite part about teaching.

I think I most connect naturally with the students who tend to be kind of nerdy or geeky. They tend to gravitate towards me as a teacher because I have similar interests as them; they watch the TV shows I like and are into superheroes and comic books. Chances are good with those kids that we're going to have something to talk about. However, I personally feel like I can connect to and relate to every single student except the one who

doesn't want to be here. That's the hardest thing for me, is connecting to the kid who is just angry and bitter all the time and doesn't want to listen to you have anything to do with you. I've tried over the years to build those kinds of bridges and reach out to the quote unquote unreachable kid, and I feel like every single time it's just a total flop.

My favorite experiences with students are when we've had opportunities to travel. I took Link Crew this year to the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. I bust my butt to get that trip approved and to get the kids on the trip. It was such hard work; I spent so many hours after school doing extra paperwork and all sorts of things. The whole time I was just thinking, "please be worth it, please be worth it." And it really was. The day we were at the Museum of Tolerance and I looked at all the kids' faces while they were going through that whole experience was awesome. The kids were crying, I was crying, it was just a cool experience.

I also try to be creative in my lessons. Last year when I taught seniors, I was hesitant to teach *Pride and Prejudice*. I had other teacher friends who had taught *Pride and Prejudice* and they all told me to steer clear, that the kids hate it and it was going to go horribly. I knew I had to do something different. The very first day I turned on old timey *Pride and Prejudice* soundtrack type music and I made them line up with girls on one side and guys on the other side. I then made them do a little partner dance that was like what they would do back then. They hated it. It was the funniest thing. I was dying laughing and by the end they were dying laughing. It was just so priceless. They said things like, "What are you doing to us Miss? Why are we doing this?" By the end of it, they were sold. We opened up *Pride and Prejudice* and they wanted to see what this

whole thing was about. They were so into it and teaching that unit was so fun. By the time we got to the movie, all the girls were swooning over Mr. Darcy.

My teaching philosophy is that every kid has unlimited potential in their particular path. It's not the same for any two kids. My job as a teacher is to help them figure out what that path is and then direct all their learning towards that thing that they want to accomplish. If my kids in my English class want to go into the military, or be an engineer, whatever it is that they want to do, I need to find a way to gear whatever it is that I'm teaching-- *Hamle*t, *To Kill a Mockingbird,* argumentative writing-- towards the skills that kid needs to acquire to be successful in his life. I have to try to make my teaching relevant for every single kid in their path. That's not easy to do, but I think that is probably the thing that I do best. The thing that I'm most proud of as an educator is that I try to listen to each kid. I try to see what they want to achieve and then gear everything that I do as an educator to their goals and their desires rather than try to bring them to my way of thinking and conform them to my goals for them.

Amanda, in her words.

My day.

I wake up anywhere from five o'clock to six o'clock and about two weekdays I'll go for a run and then listen to music. Music will always inspire me for what I want to do or convey in my classroom that day. Then I come to school, but my mornings are weird because I don't teach until fifth period this year. I'm the instructional specialist for the school-- a position that the district created and offers to schools depending on funding for that year-- as well as the school's AVID coordinator. Therefore, I have this sense of

responsibility to make sure that I don't have the luxury of prepping for my classes for four hours, but I do the things I need to do for those particular positions. Often my mornings are filled with instructional event planning and designing training. I also need to respond to emails regarding all of those things, create graphics and PowerPoints, update the professional learning network, coordinate AVID events, deal with the college tutors that we hire, complete paperwork for field trips; It just goes on and on. I often have to liaison with administration and sometimes have administrative meetings, so the mornings are packed with a lot to do.

Late in the afternoon I have to really shift my focus. I'm not good at multitasking or shifting focus, so it can be difficult. But I shift my focus to teaching. I teach AP Language and Composition one period and then I teach AVID the last period of the day. I absolutely love my AP Language and Composition class. I love my AVID class too, but just from the minute I open that door fifth hour it is joy. And it goes both ways; my students come in with big smiles on their faces. When they come in, they're joking around and we're talking about Joe's tennis match and Ty's volleyball game and Sabre's ukulele. Ty or Marcus will ask me if they can sit in my teaching chair, we just have such a good rapport. Yet, they so easily and gamely shift to an academic mindset and they are so willing to hop on board the thinking train and the idea making train. They are good readers, they like complexity, and they're interested in each other's ideas. I just love teaching fifth period. It's really great.

Then I go right back to work. I usually have a meeting two or three times a week in the afternoon and then I stay in my classroom working usually until about six o'clock

planning for future lessons or grading. I hate grading essays. I've just never in my whole twenty nine years of teaching ever synced up with assessing student writing and it's not because I don't feel like I have the wisdom to do it, it's because I would just so much rather see what they're doing well instead of what they need to improve on. I'm just always really uncomfortable telling people that they didn't do something well enough. I know that's not exactly the approach we have to take to writing assessment, but that's the message that they hear. And writing is so deeply personal, even when it's academic writing. It's so hard for me to give messages to students that are anything but really affirming and positive, and yet they need the right feedback. They need instruction, they need that kind of collaboration with their teacher. I know that there's a way to approach it so that they don't feel unaffirmed, but it's just always really tricky. There are just so many nuances to it that just makes me dread it. In some ways it's ironic that I'm an English teacher because that's so primary to teaching English, but it's so much something that I hate doing. When I go home, I typically don't work because I get distracted and I just don't want to. If I haven't gone for a run that day, I might go for a run, and then my husband and I will either go to dinner or cook dinner or get takeout, read for a little bit, and go to sleep. That's my day.

My teaching.

I like to be current in the discourse. As a teacher, I try to be a learning coach and a facilitator, I'm a collaborator. I also enjoy, and think my students benefit from some segments of, "Sage on the Stage;" but more than anything, I'm a co-learner. It's my third year teaching AP, so I am still learning along with my students. My job is so gratifying,

and I feel so lucky to teach the students that I have. I know there are other teachers who love teaching the “reluctant learners” and seeing those successes, and connect best with those students, but I really do connect with AP students.

Every day of teaching is the best day. I can say one of the best days teaching was yesterday just because every day is a good day with these kids. Every day they engage. They teach me because they have insights into the text or into the process I didn't have. My best days teaching are the days when we create meaning together, when we construct meaning together, when we discover things together. That's the thing I've always loved about teaching, there are so many opportunities for insight and so many fresh, fresh moments.

I most connect with students who have a personality that is appreciative of irony and satire. Often their humor is derived from kind of questioning of my authority or satirizing my authority and just have a good sense of humor. But they use it in a way is only gently teasing towards their peers or toward me, they don't use it to make people feel diminished. I also connect with students who love learning. However, I feel like there are no students that I can't find a way to connect with. Even if I don't connect with students at the beginning of the school year, usually by the end of the school year there is a pretty strong mutual appreciation and connection. Every year there might be a seeming disconnect between me and a student at the beginning, but by the end it irons itself out and we are able to understand the reasons that we're both here and appreciate each other for those reasons.

I view teaching as a learning philosophy; if you're not learning, you're not living. That is to say that in terms of our evolutionary imperative. Simply, biologically and neurologically, we are always learning. We're always acquiring information and skills. What's important is to determine *what* we will be learning and *how* we will be learning it because that's what shapes us as human beings. It's never been my philosophy ever that any student can't learn or won't learn because human beings cannot help but learn. It's our work to coach students to learn deliberately and to learn selectively, to make choices about how their brains develop.

What Does it Mean to Be You?

Dian, in her words.

I didn't choose teaching, teaching chose me. Whatever you want to call it, God or the universe, or fate, I feel like this is what I was put on this earth to do. Therefore, I try and honor that as best as I can. Teachers put on so many different hats. It depends on what grade you teach, where you teach, but for me, my role as a teacher is not just a teacher. I am their mentor. I am their role model. I am their mother. I am their social worker. I'm their chef. I'm their protector. I've broken a lot of rules, but if it means that my kids are safe then I'll do what I need to do to keep my kids safe.

These are the kids that truly need the most love and support. They want to know that I am there for them. I'll have kids who email me at 1:00 in the morning because they just need to talk or don't know what to do with situations that are happening in their homes. My first year of teaching I used to tell myself that I needed to be their teacher but

not their buddy. I still agree with that, but at the same time now 20 years later, I am their teacher, but I am also their friend.

Ultimately, I just want to know that they're going to graduate and they're going to be okay after graduation. I know that I don't have any role in that, but I have had students write me and tell me that they have my voice in their head whenever they make a poor decision and ask themselves what I would do or say.

My kids validate me in my job. However, the public doesn't. It drives me crazy when people who have no experience teaching try and tell me what I'm doing, how to do it better, or how to regulate my class. But again, I'm validated every day by my kids and that's all I need. I most reconsider my career choice when I have to look at my paycheck and wonder what I'm going to pay for this month: am I going to pay for my bills, am I going to pay for my food? As a professional, with professional degrees, I expect to get paid like a professional. It doesn't happen. However, I am here for the kids.

It is all about the kids. It's not about a power trip. It's not about the money. I'm just doing what I'm supposed to do and I'm honoring why I was put on this earth. It's the laughs every day. It's the "Aha!" moments. It's knowing that I am doing something that's greater than myself. I feel that there are opportunities in my field to advance but I don't take advantage of them because I don't want to. I don't want to go any higher than a teacher. For me, that is the ultimate job. I don't want to be an administrator. I don't want to be a department chair. I was called to do this job and I'm going to be the best teacher that I can. I'm going to read as much as I can. I'm going to research, but it's going to be

the way that I want to do it not because I'm going to get extra credit for it, or because I'm going to get a plaque for it. It's because I want to do it for the kids.

This is my life. This is the most important profession in the world. Without teachers you can't have doctors or lawyers or anything else. We are shaping the world. I think it is the most honorable profession when it is done well and when the intent is good. Again, this is my calling and it is a noble calling. It is exhausting, it is rewarding, it is fulfilling, and it is terrifying. But at the end of the day, I would not trade it for the world. I don't want to change the world. I just want to change my one little corner. If I can affect just one student in every class, that's six kids, and then those kids can affect somebody. It's that collective synergy that we can collectively make change. Passion is my purpose; love is my legacy.

Ruth, in her words.

I tried not to feel called to teach, but here I am. I have a connection to teenagers. I just find them fascinating. It's about being able to have fun with them. Why would you have this horrible paying job if you didn't like kids? I see people who go into teaching with an attitude of wanting to fix kids. You can't have that. You have to go into it with humor and accepting and embracing who they are now. A teacher is not just a teacher. I guide students to knowledge. I am a counselor, a mentor, a disciplinarian, a parent. I am also a gatekeeper of knowledge. I think the best thing that I can do is usher them through the door and say, "Here is this thing that I am passionate about. This is this is why I'm passionate about it. And this is really cool."

This job isn’t easy. I'm not respected by politicians. I'm respected by my colleagues; I am respected by my students; I'm respected by my family. But socially, what I do isn’t valued, at least not monetarily. That’s hard. It’s also tough to be compared to an elite charter school that doesn't take IEP kids, or take the kids who are not turning in their homework, or doesn't have to listen to the kid who went through a horrendous past and isn’t able to get dressed in the morning. We’re seen as not doing our jobs; that we're a failing school. Particularly this school. I look around and I don't see failures.

I remember specifically being angry that at one point we got a raise of one point five percent. I felt that was even more insulting than no raise whatsoever. It’s like being a restaurant server who is given a penny or a dollar instead of an actual tip. The fact that the table actually made an effort to give you a bad tip, that's what the raise felt like. There are times when I thought, “should I be doing something different than teaching?” Then I think about never seeing the kids again, never seeing my colleagues again, and the visualization of doing something other than teaching; I can't fathom.

About five years ago I had an epiphany that I contribute to the culture at EMHS. That they don’t just need a teacher, but they need me specifically. I'm one of the veteran teachers now. I can create a legacy. I can perpetuate this culture that we have at the school for the kids and incoming teachers. Unfortunately, the only way to technically advance is to go out of the classroom. I don't want to do that. I don't want to leave the kids. The way the teaching profession is set up, if you want to advance, you can't do what you wanted to do in the first place when you started to teach.

Teaching is my identity. Within two minutes of talking to someone, they'll know I'm a teacher. It has been frustrating; It has been wonderful. It has allowed me to be more creative than I ever thought I would be. It has allowed me to grow as a person. I wouldn't be who I am or what I am now without teaching. What does teaching mean to me? I don't know what I would do if I couldn't teach. If suddenly I didn't have the ability or was told that I couldn't teach kids anymore, I don't know what I would do. It is such a visceral part of me. A few years ago, my mom got sick and just coming here every day and seeing the kids and smiling at them and having them smile back, it fed me. I have figured out that this is what I need to do in my life.

I want that for my students too. If I can connect what I teach to their lives, I've done my job. My job is to teach them empathy, to teach them the importance of literature even if they are not necessarily interested in it at first. I want to show them the purpose of a person's work who sat down and wrote words down in order to share something with the world. However, I also think my job is to show the students that they have a voice. I want them to know that they can be heard even if they're still developing their voices. Maybe what they say now isn't going to be their opinion ten years from now, but they can still say it. If I've done my job right, hopefully they'll feel like a whole enough person to share who they are with the world. I want them to know that they can be who they are. I want them to know that if they don't have the answers now, then they know where to find them.

Callie, in her words.

On the surface, a teacher is someone who guides others in their education to be able to obtain the knowledge necessary to be successful in life. It's obviously a lot more than that. I have to be a mentor, a parent in the instance where their parents are absent, a friend to the kids who don't have any. I am the guidance counselor to the kid who's trying to pick their major and figure out life. There's just so much we have to be and be everything all at once. However, I guess teachers don't have to be everything, but we all do because we care about our students or we wouldn't be doing it.

My least favorite part of my job are the worksheets and the grading, I think my main role is being the mentor, or guidance counselor, or sibling, or parent--or whatever else they need-- because if a student wants to learn, they will regardless of what teacher they have. But not every teacher is really good at connecting with kids. I actually like helping them understand things about life in a real way and in a way that applies to them. I think that's my strength.

When I tell people what I do, most of them tell me I'm crazy. They're like, "I don't know why you do that." My friends on the other hand are very complementary, they see teaching as being noble and it's like I'm a war hero or something because I teach teenagers. The general public, though, does not respect the profession. In one of my internships as an undergrad student, the kids did an assignment on creating similes and one of them was a fill in the blank "teaching is like____ because ____." One Eighth grader wrote, "teaching is like making a bowl of cereal because they're both easy jobs." I think that's how the general public views it.

Teaching is more than just a job. It is quite literally, up until this point, the only thing that I saw myself doing. Throughout the course of finishing schooling, doing my internships, and doing my student teaching, it became very obvious that this is what I'm supposed to be doing. It was really important for me to be in it. If I could stay in it, I would. If I could afford to stay in it, I would.

I am currently training to pass the FBI physical fitness test. I am in the process of applying to become a special agent in the FBI. Every time I have a bad day at work, which seems to be more and more these days, I get online and I look at jobs. I've had a lot of colleagues leave. Our school in particular has a pretty high turnover rate these days and I've seen some colleagues leave and go do other things and I've gotten increasingly frustrated with lack of advancement.

I'm too ambitious to be doing the exact same thing that I'm doing 20 years from right now. On a particularly bad day, I got online and was looking at job opportunities and saw that the FBI is recruiting former teachers. I had no idea that that was even a possibility. It's one of those things that I never thought was a possibility or an opportunity until now. Once I realized that I could do it, I thought I'd throw my hat in the ring. What's the worst that could happen?

It’s a hard feeling though, you feel like you’re jumping ship. Like you’re a deserter. I don’t know if other careers are like that but in education there’s this sense of guilt for wanting to maybe leave. Especially with the programs I’m involved in, I feel connected to the success of the programs and the kids coming into it and I think, “if I were to walk away, what's going to happen to that program? What's going to happen to

those kids? What opportunities are they going to miss out on?" Can they do what I can do? Offer what I can offer? I have coworkers who tell me I can't leave. They say, "what would I do without you?" But I have to look out for me.

I really don't know what I'm going to do in the future. I've never been less sure of anything in my entire life. It's tempting to just stay here forever because it's what you know and it's what's comfortable. But it's also hard seeing your peers move onward and upward and get pay raises when that's a foreign thing here. Within the profession itself you can't really advance unless you want to be an administrator or up in the district level which then takes away all the things that I actually like about education and like about teaching. It would be one thing if the job changed or grew with me, but it just doesn't. It would be different too if it was 20 years ago and the payscale actually still existed and you could actually still move up it, but it doesn't. I want my education to be worth it. I have a master's degree and I still don't make in a year what I owe in student loans.

To stay in teaching is the ultimate sacrifice. I sacrifice money in order to be in a profession that I find valuable and that I enjoy. I enjoy coming to work every day, I don't dread it. I enjoy the coworkers I deal with on a regular basis. I like the students. They are humble, they're approachable. They're easy to relate to. They're my people. This classroom is kind of my home away from home. But if someone walked into my room and offered me a job right now that paid more and that I'd enjoy just as much as what I'm doing right now. I'd leave. But I'm not sure that exists, apart from maybe the FBI.

Teaching is the most important profession in the world. That's cliché, but it's true. It creates all the professions. So many of these kids have to deal with things on a daily

basis that are some of the hardest things you will ever have to deal with in your life. So many of them don't have the chance to even start. Teachers can make a difference to these kids. It's extremely important and undervalued. I'd like every kid to know that I cared. However, in all honesty, if one kid walks away and thinks, "my life is better because I had you as a teacher" that's good enough for me.

Amanda, in her words.

The role of a teacher is to be a learning coach, a learning facilitator, a learning mentor, a guide, a role model of a leading light. Intellectually and academically, someone who is key in preparing a human being for college and career and for life. However, I contrast with teachers I've known throughout the years who really did see their role as not just an academic mentor but also a life coach, I never saw myself that way. I knew there were moments where I did life coaching and I always embedded social and emotional learning components into teaching literature because they were there and that's what it means to teach literature. You're looking at how life happens and you're making meaning out of those narratives.

This profession pretty much means everything to me. It's startling to see how much of my happiness or my mood is tied to what's happening in the classroom and how much of how I feel when I wake in the morning is tied to what's happening in the classroom. I don't consciously think every day, "teaching means so much to me," but it clearly does because it affects so much of how I feel about my life and my personhood and my identity. It was only a few years ago that I really realized and acknowledged that I need my students. I always felt like I don't need them. I viewed it as this is what I've

chosen to do as a profession and I really love it and I feel like I'm fairly competent at it, but I didn't think I needed them, or they needed me either. However, it was a few years ago that I realized oh yes, I do. My identity is really predicated on the give and take that I have with my students. It's a weird concept. I'm not a person who feels comfortable being vulnerable in any way. So that was just a weird realization for me.

I have almost always felt validated as a teacher. I always felt that I was improving all the time. I don't need notes of appreciation, I know what I'm doing as a teacher is important and I know it's having an impact. My validation comes from my classroom and the feedback I get from my students. I have been in social circles where people are in a different place professionally or financially and have reactions to my profession like, "huh, you chose that path, you couldn't have done anything else?" And while it's not that overt, it is there. But when people seem dismissive of it, I kind of don't care because I feel my validation for being a teacher really does come from what happens in the classroom.

Teachers are more important than anyone or anything besides students. They are also the group in the education system that is most subordinated to all the other concerns. The system treats teachers as if they are almost an afterthought, as if they're unnecessary. As if teachers are cost instead of just integral. I feel so shafted in terms of professional compensation. I try to be grateful because it makes my life easier on a day to day basis and I try to think about all the people who aren't earning 67 thousand dollars a year. So, part of me feels compelled, and I feel the wisdom in being grateful. But I also feel like it

should have been so much better than this. I don't want my daughters to go into teaching. I just don't think that the validation will be there for them.

In terms of career trajectory, the only routes that I perceive that are really available to teachers are teachers staying in the classroom, or becoming an administrator and leaving the classroom. I feel like if opportunities for advancement were more merit based and there was a cultivation of teachers for leadership roles that weren't specifically tied to making that decision pretty early in your career to go into administration, it might help retain more teachers. I recently had a conversation with a younger teacher who spoke about how he wasn't interested in getting a master's because he didn't see the point. He never saw himself wanting to leave the classroom. I told him that I understood that he thought he would be fulfilled being in the classroom until he's 55 or 60, but he might really change his mind in his 50s. The opportunity for advancement was never important to me until I turned 54. I had no way of foreseeing that I might be interested in a role outside the classroom one day because I loved being in the classroom so much and I still do. But I wish there were more opportunities open for teachers who have been in the profession a while.

Teaching is also hard, the moments I've most considered leaving are those moments of waking up in the night or waking up in the morning and just being so agitated about students who disrupted the learning for other students. That's kind of a really formal way of putting it, but that's what it is like. Just the frustration and the sense of failure at not being able to just have a streamlined process in the classroom. Day to day to day to day.

Nevertheless, I've had opportunities to leave the profession, but I've always come back. There are a multitude of reasons why, but it really comes down to that if I didn't love teaching, I would never have come back. For me, teaching is about the moment to moment. The "in the moment learning" that happens and that is spectacularly stimulating for me. It's that endorphin production, those chills. That's what keeps me teaching, and just feeling the richness of that learning relationship. The student-teacher relationship is a relationship of trust unlike any other and I feel almost kind of emotional when I talk about it because learning is so essential to survival. Almost more essential than anything beyond our bodily needs, and I'm the conduit for that. It is a bond that you build because learning together is kind of unbreakable in a way. It's unlike any other dynamic among humans and it's unlike any other relationship. There is this deep and pervasive intimacy about it that is also completely impersonal. It's being creative together.

I'm not under any illusions that teaching will in some way, even in one person's mind, immortalize me. It was never my goal to have a lasting life-long impact. It was always my goal for students to get into my classroom and learn. That is my goal every single day. It was never my goal for them to remember me, to feel like I had made a difference in their lives. It was just the, "right now, in this class, we need to learn." However, I will say that when I was in high school and college, I used to fantasize about being a teacher and I used to think about what it would be like, and I would imagine myself saying, "I'm working with people your age because I really care about you."

I still feel that way more than ever. I really feel like I love teenagers, I love the youth. So, in that way, I think-- even though I didn't overtly feel like it—I was called to

teaching. I've just always thought of teaching in terms of supplying a steppingstone along the way that students really need. They need what I'm teaching in this class, but only as a step in a really long process. My hope is that students are elevated, empowered, and smarter for having spent 56 minutes with me every day.

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I remember a conversation actually with a Spanish teacher that I didn't like. Oddly enough his name was Mr. B---, but I remember because I was a troublemaker in that class. And he pulled me aside one day and he's like, "What are your plans for after high school?" And I was like a sophomore, so I hadn't really thought about it a whole lot. And I was like, "Ah you know, I'm funny, I want to make people laugh. That's what I want to do for a living, maybe I'll be a standup comedian, maybe I'll be a writer or something like a musician." I played a lot of guitar at that time, so I thought I'd be like a rock star. Anyway, I remember him looking at me and going, "I think whatever you do, it's going to be exceptional." And I was like, not a good student in that class. I was rude to him a lot. I was very sarcastic, but he was so sincere. He's like, "Whatever you do, you're gonna be exceptional. Don't sell yourself short, whatever you do, put everything into it, and I expect amazing things from you. I expect to read your name in the headlines."

And I was like. What?! Where did that come from? ... I remember that conversation, I remember feeling the same way it kind of felt in seventh grade when I had had someone express explicit belief and confidence in me. I didn't get a lot of that at home to be honest. And that's not to say I have bad parents; I have great parents. But again, we had a lot of problems in that phase of my life. So, it was nice coming to school and hearing that from a teacher.

-Callie, Interview 1

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CHAPTER 5

THREADED FINDINGS

"I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist and that there are as few as there are any other great artists. It might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit." -John Steinbeck

Thematic Analysis: Identifying Commonalities Amongst the Narratives

The previous chapter allowed me to present the stories of the participants in their narrative form without inserting my own conclusions or deductions from their accounts in response to my primary research question of what we can learn about why teachers stay in the field from personal narrative accounts. Nevertheless, as a narrative inquirer, I did not just happen upon these stories but rather participated in their creation (Riessman, 2008). The accounts were delivered to me in the first place because I asked. Additionally, my questions were indeed targeted towards discovering insight into a particular issue. In order to analyze what I uncovered on the issue of teacher retention, I participated in another model of narrative analysis known as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis has an increased emphasis on the content of the narratives organized by themes. Riessman (2008) asserts that this approach is useful for theorizing across multiple cases and locating common elements amongst the experiences and events recounted by the participants. This analysis also allows me to examine and report data that was not relayed in the condensed restoried experiences that were specific to interaction, situation/place, and continuity in chapter four.

However, it is important to note that these are themes constructed by me and from my observations and are not without deviance and ambiguity. While two accounts may appear to say similar things, that is my interpretation. In this, I am restricted to my personal limitations and understanding of the accounts. Clandinin et al. (2015) warned against the idea of simply thinking "about stories" as it coincides with the "dominant paradigmatic knowledge structures, [by] doing so can shape us into judging and blaming people who are seen as characters in stories. In this way people are seen as fixed and frozen objects rather than people living out experience." Thinking about stories risks shaping accounts to predetermined criteria. As such, while I completed a thematic analysis approach, I lay out my discoveries with this disclaimer. I also present them as threads rather than unyielding themes. In this approach, I lay out threads I felt were intertwined amongst the various accounts and offer my thoughts into how these components might bring depth and insight to our understanding of teacher retention.

Thread 1: Work Environment

Teacher/ school conditions.

Throughout the interviews with all participants, I noted that these individuals appreciated aspects of the teaching profession that are afforded and perhaps unique to this particular career path. For instance, Callie noted that she enjoys certain perks such as a schedule that still allows her to spend time at home with her family and young children, "I like the time off. I've got two little kids. I like to be able to spend time with them. I like to be able to get home at like five o'clock every day and not be at work till nine or 10 on a weekday. I like having weekends off and holidays." Callie also enjoys the constant

variety of a teaching life, “I have to leave my home, I have to go somewhere I’m needed, and the thing about teaching, the reason I love my job, is no two days are the same. I get to meet new people, I thrive on change, I get to meet like 138 new students every year” (Observation 2). However, more specific to the advantageous working conditions of teaching in general, the majority of the participants expressed attachment and appreciation for their specific school environments.

Ruth and Dian in particular were unanimously positive in their praise for their school’s environment including their campus, students, administration, and colleagues.

> Honestly, East Meadow is--of course I'm biased--but is the best...it has been known to be the quote unquote ghetto school and that drives me crazy. It is an amazing school. We have schools within schools. We have AVID, we have AP, we have IB... We have a lot of kids with special needs, but I love that, that's what makes EMHS so diverse and everybody is family. The kids treat each other with respect...But my colleagues, especially English, I love them. We are a sisterhood; we are a family. But we all support each other. When the chips are down. If one of our colleagues is sick or in the hospital, we are there for them. When like if somebody needs to go for an hour, we'll cover their you know their class. So, we just do. We love each other and we see each other outside of school. We have a new administration and I love what our new principal is doing. He truly is about the teachers as well as about the kids. (Dian, Interview 2)

Ruth echoed similar feelings by commenting that the staff was expressively supportive of one another and always willing to lend a hand by supplying teaching material for new topics or offering helpful ideas.

Amanda and Callie likewise expressed attachment to the student body at Valley High, calling it a unique and humble group of students. Amanda noted that this characteristic was even more dominant when she first began teaching at VHS:

> I felt like students were so uncharacteristically supportive of each other...when the movie *Mean Girls* came out...I maintained that that was just not a dynamic that existed at Valley High School. And I think I was fairly accurate about that. I know it was true that there were kids here who suffered and who felt marginalized and excluded. So, I'm not, I'm not living in a dream world about that, but it really was a special environment. (Amanda, Interview 2)

Amanda also commented that students at VHS had less sense of entitlement than those at other schools she worked for. Callie expressed this notion as well, “The kids are humble, they're approachable. They're easy to relate to. They're my people” (Interview 2). Callie also commented on enjoying a close group of coworkers that she interacts with frequently. In fact, Callie expressed her connection to her students and a small group of colleagues as being some of the hardest factors in her current thoughts of pursuing another professional field. Ruth vocalized this as well when discussing that whenever she visualized leaving teaching and thought about never seeing her students or co-workers again, it was too great of a loss and the downfalls of teaching were trumped by these environmental factors.

All of the participants also commented on the fact that their schools seem to be striving for continual improvement, whether in terms of physical conditions--both schools have gone through extensive renovations and technology improvements in recent years--or in support of the students and faculty. “I would say...that we’re always striving to be the kind of social emotional and academic institution that students need. We fall short in a lot of ways, but we are identifying our areas of strength and weakness and we’re really trying to address our areas of weakness” (Amanda, Interview 2). The public-school district that both EMHS and VHS belong to has in this last year implemented a push for social and emotional learning for students in addition to academic. Ruth commented that at a recent professional development late-start day, the administration had arranged massages for the teachers. She expressed that as a teacher, that gesture felt validating in that the administration trusted them in knowing how to do their jobs, and wanted to show them gratitude for what they do.

Autonomy.

Another component that appeared obvious to me throughout my interviews with these four participants, is that they are strong, independent women, who are able to ignore the buzz of outside distractions, factors, criticism, or external politics, and close the door and teach. They enjoy having the autonomy to make decisions for their students within their classrooms.

> In terms of my colleagues, as a teacher, I have to say it doesn't matter. It doesn't impact the work I do. I don't blame other teachers for my students not being prepared. I meet my students where they are ... That's what I've always loved

about teaching. My classroom is like my business. I mean like my small business, I manage it. I make the decisions for it. What other people are doing doesn't really impact me that much. (Amanda, Interview 2)

Ruth commented that one of the best things about the administration at EMHS is that they have been "kind of a laissez faire" administration. "East Meadow, I think has tradition and ways that our administration has really trusted their teachers...they allow us to do what we need to do in order to teach the kids" (Interview 2). Ruth also acknowledged that one of the things that compelled her into teaching rather than staying an aide was the desire to have the independence of her own methods and decisions in the classroom. Autonomy was something she craved.

Dian showed a bit more active resistance in her desire to control components of the classroom, "I defy a lot of the rules just because I think they're illogical… You know again, I just, I walk into my room and I teach...I'm a bit of a renegade. But I've been doing this for 21 years. So. I kind of am stuck in my way" (Interview 2). At one point during our second interview I asked Dian if her breaking point would be if her autonomy were ever completely taken away from what she was able to do in her classroom. Dian's response, "Oh yea, if they take away my Multicultural Literature and my Native American Literature [class] I'd be gone...if somebody...a politician comes down to my class and says, 'no you can't teach this anymore'...that would destroy me." Additionally, Dian vocalized that her primary commitment is to her students. She has forgone opportunities in leadership positions because she wants her days to be devoted to her students and the work she does in the classroom, "I don't like going to meetings. You

know again ...I don't like the bull cocky of it...I'm fine with being a little minion. Tell me what to do and I'll do it as long as I have autonomy in my class and what I do" (Interview 2).

Callie's classroom is located in a portable, a bit off the beaten path, and she likes it that way.

> I like autonomy. I like being able to control my environment. So especially being out here in a portable day in and day out there will be days where I don't see anybody else except for my students and then my co-teacher and that's it. And that's fantastic to me because I kind of get to feel like my own boss. I get to, like, be the master of my own domain. (Interview 2)

As much as Callie expressed enjoying the autonomy she gets from teaching, she also showed its significance to her teaching by vocalizing her disdain from micromanagement or directives that she views to be ill-informed. When asked what she least enjoys about teaching, Callie didn't blink, "Stupid people telling me what to do. I can't believe I just said that out loud, but that's what it is. Stupid people...I want to leave when someone comes to me and says, 'hey you know that's a great idea that you have but you can't do it because I said so'" (Interview 2). Callie shared recent examples where several ideas of ways to strengthen her club or raise funds were overruled for reasons that didn't appear valid.

> I go to admin and I say, 'hey, let me tell you what --- High School is doing to make their Link Crew amazing [and] it's working out really well.' They come to me and go, 'ya, we can't do that.' OK, well then don't come to me and tell me

> that Link Crew's not effective, that my program's not effective, because I'm telling you how to make it effective and you're telling me no. Those are the days where I'm like, 'Oh, I gotta get out of here.' (Interview 2)

Throughout these responses, it became apparent to me that autonomy was something these teachers enjoy in their classrooms. Their personalities dictate that they have control over their environment and that they are trusted to make their own decisions for the best instructional practices and well-being of their students. However, as much as they enjoy autonomy, it is also something they guard preciously, aware that it can be taken away and jeopardized from top-down mandates. Up to this point, however, these teachers have been able to "grin and bear it" as Callie put it, "every time a new directive comes down or whatever, it's like, all right, just grin and bear it because it'll be different next year" (Interview 2). Or in the case of Dian, are able to outwardly resist and continue to teach the way they feel to be best for their students.

These feelings coincide with the literature on retention when Hattie (2008) discusses the importance of validating teachers in their expertise and experience and granting them autonomy that reflects that. Teachers who stay in the field are granted to some degree this level of environmental control--or are able to maintain it despite external factors, and have a personal investment professionally and emotionally to their place of work.

Thread 2: Pedagogy/ Teaching Style

The second thread that I discovered amongst these teachers through their interview responses but also through observing their classroom teaching was their

proficiency in teaching. Although three of the four participants could be considered "veteran teachers" --having been in the field for over ten years, or twenty in the case of Dian and Amanda-- their teaching practices are innovative, engaging, student focused, absent of classroom disruption, streamlined, and challenging. Ruth told me that she never teaches the same lesson twice. As a former secondary teacher myself, I find that truly astounding and admirable. Somehow, these teachers have learned to avoid the "rut" than can often befall upon long career teachers.

Amanda mentioned teaching new-to-her classes which resulted in creativity and discovery along with her students. Callie discussed implementing fun lesson ideas when introducing new material, such as her line dancing lesson discussed in chapter four when frontloading the book *Pride and Prejudice*. Dian made an interesting comment that teachers "often teach the way they were taught." However, through a graduate level writing course and a mentor teacher, she felt that "he just completely changed the paradigm for me," which is evidenced in the current student-focused lessons I observed from her classroom.

Engagement/ student-centered.

Every lesson I observed from these four teachers showed their emphasis on student engagement and student-centered learning. During my second observation of Amanda's AP Language class, the students participated in a micro-Socratic seminar.

> Amanda: Here's the claim (reading it from board), 'It's impossible to be happy without money.' So thoughts, do you agree or disagree with the claim?

> One student jumps in and talks about how money makes it more convenient to do things like help other people. Money is a tool to use for good if used that way. Another student talks about after her parents' divorce, while her mom, sister, and she were poor, they weren't unhappy, but it was hard and emotional on her mom. Another student says it depends on the perspective, some people who are rich are happy, and some aren't. She says you can be happy and poor.
>
> Amanda: Do you think you'd be happier than you are right now if you won the lottery. And it's a big one. Go ahead joe. (Amanda, Observation 2)

This is just a microscopic example of all that I observed from Amanda's classroom. The questions asked were relevant to the students, they were able to draw from their own experiences and opinions, and created the opportunity for them to learn from one another as they then transitioned to analyzing an essay on a related topic.

Every lesson I observed from Dian had a similar student-focused emphasis. One lesson I didn't observe but was told about during our second interview is what Dian called "feather circles."

> I make copies of everything that the kids have written ... and we sit. I have them in three circles of 10 and the kids will read their stories out loud and to the other kids … and they highlight all the stuff that they love [about their peer's writings] ... And then they give it back to the original kid who wrote so they can see all the stuff that the kids liked about it. Then they choose three of those … write personal thank you letters to those kids and they have to use words and phrases from that writing piece to again validate the kid … a girl today couldn't finish reading

> because it was so close to home where the writing piece was... she was writing about her dad and how abusive he was so she looks at me and she just whispers I can't do this. And so, she stepped out of the classroom and I talked to the person next to her and said, 'Can you finish reading for her so that we can still hear her story out loud'. And so, all the kids...wrote her a thank you letter … they're just like thank you for sharing, that took so much strength to trust us with your story. (Dian, Interview 2)

This teaching practice shows effective peer feedback, reflection, and student efficacy. This particular moment shows that Dian's focus is equally balanced between student emotional and academic growth. She used opportunities in the classroom for students to learn about the material, how to become a better writer, but also to learn and empathize with others, and to learn about themselves. Dian's role as a teacher is clearly based on people and not just curriculum. With this type of focus, teaching can never become truly redundant as the students and their individual needs are different every year.

High expectations.

These teachers have high expectations of their students and of themselves. This is something that comes through in their daily teaching practices, the focus of their lessons, and the level of preparedness they come to school with every day.

> A group of teachers ... the other day were talking about lesson planning and like the degree to which we foreground our lesson with our students every day and we write out our lessons so that our students can see what it is, and you've seen my PowerPoint slides. And they were like you do that every day. I was like you don't

do that every day? So, I have been very consistently, super responsible and really invested. (Amanda, Interview 2)

Additionally, with preparation comes confidence. Callie expressed feeling fairly proficient in what she does, “I think I'm pretty good at what I do... I think I've done a lot and I've done a lot of good things for the school and I've done a lot of good things for my students” (Interview 2). Ruth talked about doing extensive research and preparation every day for her upcoming courses and Dian expressed wanting to always continue growing as a teacher and do what she needed to be prepared, but that she wasn’t looking for accolades or recognition, she just wanted to do it for the students because it’s what they deserved (Interview 2).

In addition to personal expectations and confidence as a teacher, these English instructors also demand rigorous levels of thinking for their students. They push the potential of each of their students because they fully believe that their students are more capable than the students know themselves to be. Callie discussed this in her teaching philosophy in chapter 4 when she mentions that all students have unlimited potential in the thing that is unique to them, and it’s her job as a teacher to discover that, tap into it, and assist them in that path. My observations of these teachers also revealed an endless stream of questions that asked the students to do more, to think more, to be capable of more. The students almost always rose to the challenge:

Amanda: Should anyone have to be poor in a developed society?

A student responds that it's important to know both sides in order to appreciate what you have. Another student discusses that there should be a bottom line so that all basic necessities are met (Amanda, Observation 2).

Callie employed similar questioning tactics in a lesson I observed as she prepared students for a debate on real-world issues of contention.

Callie: Is anyone in here doing assisted suicide? Obviously, it's not so cut and dry right? Because we're having a debate about it-- so you can talk about how those people are playing God, however, then I need you to come back with the strengthening side of my argument to refute that--I'm essentially countering them, that's a really important part of the structure of your essay and the debate itself, you have to think about what they are going to say so you are able to refute it. (Observation 1)

Dian encourages her students to be their own teachers and to take learning and discovery into their own hands. She talked about urging students to use the technological devices that they almost all have permanently attached to themselves and to use them as tools for investigation into knowledge they want to acquire.

My kids are like Oh Miss, ... this unit was so short and there's so much I want to learn... Google it on your phone you know you have the power to learn...I tell them I just I want to get you interested in it but you then have to take the next step to educate yourself. So, I said you can be a teacher for others and what you've learned but make sure that you're educating them correctly by gaining more knowledge for yourself. (Dian, Interview 1)

Ruth also recounted similar occurrences of pushing her students to learn and research questions that they have. In one example she mentioned having a student question whether or not Eli Wiesel was actually a Holocaust survivor because of something she had seen on the internet about him not having the tattooed numbers on his arm. Rather than just dismissing this student's question, Ruth encouraged this student to look further into the source of the information and determine whether or not it was legitimate and reliable. After some research, Ruth was able to show the student that the source was indeed an anti-Semitic website and helped her determine for the future how to adequately discern between reliable and unreliable websites (Ruth, Interview 2).

The student-centered pedagogy that all these participants employ, I believe, assist in their daily impact, personal accomplishment, and ability to feel growth, challenge, and renewal in their careers. During my undergraduate teacher-education I was told that teachers do not teach a subject, rather they teach students. I feel this to be true for these particular teachers. Their dedication to their students' growth shines through in their methodology and personal skill as educators.

Thread 3: External Factors

While the majority of my data and research focus was on these participants as teachers in the teaching arena, it was important for me to highlight that these participants are individuals with lives, experiences, hobbies, and passions outside of the classroom that very much impact who the person is that turns up to school every day. In my first year of teaching seventh grade, a student asked me what my plans were for the weekend. I told him I had to work. This student then asked where I worked. At first, I didn't know

how to respond to this question--if I should laugh, or be a bit startled that the student didn't realize I meant I needed to do work for my job as a teacher.

I think to so many students, parents, and those on the outside--teachers live, breathe, and die in their classrooms. There is no other person or identity than the one standing with the clipboard at the whiteboard. Sometimes, it's hard for teachers to make the separation themselves. I remember telling Dian that I wanted her to recount her day before and after school to get a more well-rounded picture of her life outside her classroom, she responded in good humor that she really didn't have one. Teaching is certainly a consuming profession that plays a larger role than that of a means to acquire an income. Callie commented on this particular phenomenon:

> My dad worked for the police department. Did he ever love that? No…. it paid really well; it gave him great benefits. He's like 'I woke up at 5:00 a.m. every day to go to a job that I didn't really like but I did it for 30 years so I could retire and live nice.' You know, that's how he viewed his job. And I think a lot of people view their job kind of that way.
>
> Teaching is not like that. Maybe for some people and then they don't last and then they get out of it. (Callie, Interview 2)

Nevertheless, while teaching may be almost inseparable from the person doing the teaching, there are indeed factors that take place outside of the classroom that affect the person within, and play a role into that person's decision to remain in the profession or not. These teachers in particular who have chosen thus far to stay in the field have some unique commonalities such as extensive work, school, and life experiences outside of the

secondary teaching field. Additionally, home-life structures play a significant role in their career retention.

Breadth of experience.

Ruth didn't begin her teaching career until her thirties. Before teaching, she worked various other jobs and had a passion for theater, which is also what her undergraduate degree is in. Her experience in theater extended through various roles of acting, managing, directing, working the technical side, and more. She also feels that this experience impacts her teaching ability, "I feel like [with] my theater experience, I had an easier time when I transitioned into teaching than say somebody who maybe was an engineer" (Interview 1). This is when she mentioned having the experience of being in front of 300 people and missing a line and that prepared her for whatever a teenager might throw at her. She knows how to roll with the punches, "I think that because of my experiences before I became a teacher, I can handle just a lot more of the stuff that comes with teaching." Ruth also reflects that she wouldn't have changed having those experiences, "I think if I started teaching when I was in my 20s, I don't know if I would have been as confident as I was when I started teaching in my 30s" (Interview 2). She continued that these outside world experiences offer her insight and empathy to her students that other teachers may not have.

Like Ruth, Amanda was also heavily involved in theater in college and was even awarded a theater scholarship. Additionally, Amanda took a gap year during college to move to Europe with her family. After her teaching career began, she had several opportunities to pursue other interests and fulfill different roles such as leaving teaching

to stay at home with her two young daughters while also teaching for the local community college. Lastly, as was recounted in Amanda's teaching journey, she took a year off to attend law school, also on scholarship. These diverse interests and life experiences definitely contribute to Amanda's character and what she can offer to her students in the classroom.

Callie was initially a journalism major with the end goal of getting into screenwriting. Although that is not where her path led her, it has given her experience and passion outside of the English teaching field that allows her to relate to her students and continue to pursue other hobbies and interests. After graduating college, Callie also served a mission for her church for a year and a half in Jamaica. During this time her focus was on religious instruction, but she also had the opportunity to do some literacy instruction for residents of the area as well, "A kid, he was 17 years old ... didn't know how to read. So, we worked together on reading and then I also got to teach English as a Second Language classes for Haitians in the Bahamas who didn't speak English. So, I got to do that for a few months so that was really cool. Got to put some of my degree to use" (Callie, Interview 1).

Like Callie, Dian also initially pursued journalism. After finishing college, Dian worked for a large state-wide newspaper doing mostly personal feature articles. While her original goals were to be a world-renowned reporter and travel the world, life just didn't quite happen that particular way she had planned. Nevertheless, Dian regrets nothing.

> Because of that I have a love of language and I have a lot of my own stories in print so I can show the kids...I know what I am talking about...and that authority and that knowledge of the beauty and power of language. I feel like being a reporter first and then a teacher validates me as an English teacher...I tell my kids I am not just a writing teacher; I am a teacher who writes. (Dian, Interview 2)

Dian's experiences helped shape her into a teacher with real-world experience and knowledge about how words are used and how they can be powerful tools. This is knowledge that she then is able to share with her students.

Home life/ security.

For these participants, factors at home largely contribute to their decisions to be in the teaching field. Callie spoke extensively about how her desire to pursue journalism and screenwriting was overruled by her desire to have a family, "I just wasn't willing to sacrifice the normalcy of a normal life" (Interview 2). This resulted in the pursuit of a career that would offer more stability and home-friendliness, "I felt like I needed to switch my major to something that would be...secure and steady and I would be able to have kids" (Callie, Interview 1).

Additionally, Callie spoke about the importance of being able to be home at a decent time and have regularly scheduled holidays and time-off so that she is present for her two young children. These family-centered activities have been worth sacrificing other career perks for, such as money. However, family is also why Callie claims that she needs to perhaps look for something else at this point, "if I could stay in it, I would. If I could afford to stay in it, I would. But at the end of the day is it worth sacrificing like me

and my family and my family's happiness and contentment so that I can teach? No" (Interview 2).

Amanda claimed that her home-life structure contributed to her retention in the teaching profession, but for different reasons than Callie's, "I had a spouse whose income was almost twice what mine was. So, I didn't have a financial concern" (Interview 2). In this statement, Amanda reflects on what is different between her and teachers who have left. She discusses that many of the best teachers are the ones who are smart and capable and could easily pursue a profession elsewhere that would be more lucrative, however, for her, money wasn't a stressor because of her family dynamic.

Ruth, on the other hand, as a single woman, relies on the security and stability of her teaching career. She reflected that a difference between herself and perhaps teachers who choose to leave could be family or home dynamics that she didn't have.

> I think it's possible that those ones who do go feel that they do have the net ... I was never married. So, if I change careers, I'd better know exactly what that career is. So that's part of it... And this would be a third you know career for me. So, if I change something, I'd better know that it would...definitely be better than where I was. (Interview 2)

The "net" that Ruth refers to in the above quote is that of a financial safety net provided by another income provider in the household. Not having this "net" makes the prospect of changing careers that much more uncertain, and as Ruth states, she'd have to be positive about where she was headed next and that it would be better than where she was.

Nevertheless, Ruth continued the statement by saying that she could never really visualize something that would be better than her current teaching career.

Callie also spoke to the financial security aspect of staying in the teaching field as one of the factors that have kept her there thus far, “I mean like what am I in all this debt for if not to do this. Like isn't this why I got my degrees like yeah you know what am I going to do? Go sell cars?...Yeah I definitely feel pigeonholed” (Interview 2). Callie is talking about how there’s an element of feeling committed to the teaching profession because of the financial investment that was made towards that specific field. These responses are consistent with the Inman & Marlow (2004) study where teachers surveyed in Georgia reported job security as one of their primary motivations to remaining in the field. Callie continued the thoughts of feeling “stuck” in the profession as a result of time constraints and time investments, “I think all the time, I'm like well what if I had done this or what if I had done that, or what if I had done this? And in your 20s you're kind of like ‘oh try that’. But now, I'm getting you know into my 30s, and I'm like ‘oh I don't know, I can't really start over, like I invested a lot of time into this’” (Interview 2). In addition to financial investments, the time investment into the profession makes it difficult to leave. Something that Ruth also mentioned.

Dian discussed a past home life and family relationships that weren’t always ideal or stable. The teaching profession provides the continuity and stability that perhaps these other areas do not, “I mean I love my life...again it's routine. It's mundane. I know exactly what to expect. And at this point in my life that's all I want. I don't want any surprises. I don't want the drama that my brother brings. You know, I don't want any of that. So, I

just I love my life" (Dian, Interview 1). In Dian's classroom, she is in control of her surroundings and has the experience to handle what students bring. She enjoys the structured repetition that sometimes occurs year after year.

Thread 4: Personality Markers

I think it's safe to say that not everyone can be an effective teacher. In my experience, it definitely takes a certain persona and specific character traits to be able to handle all the things that are required in a workday of a teacher. These happen to be particular personality markers that I have found the four women in this study to have. All of the participants are dynamic; they have arts, performance, or leadership experience and backgrounds that allow them to command the attention of a classroom. Additionally, these women are funny. They employ humor with their students, they understand teenage sarcasm and can throw it back in playful and respectful ways. These women have a passion for the content that they teach, and can convey that to the teenagers in their classrooms who would rather browse their Instagram accounts than discuss books. These women also have a love for the learning process. Lastly, teaching has become an intrinsic and integral component of their identities. I believe each of these personality traits marks these women as uniquely fit for the teaching profession and has contributed to their effectiveness, success, and confidence as a secondary English teacher and consequently their retention.

Leadership.

The four participants in this study have all found themselves in leadership positions during their teaching tenure. Additionally, the leadership trait is something they often demonstrated as students themselves.

> I was a reporter, I was an editor, I was a layout editor, I did this in high school as well as in college. And it just kind of again... not necessarily intentionally wanting positions of authority but I was in positions of authority a lot that I personally placed myself in... I don't think it's necessarily for the power... but again it was the helping others. (Dian, Interview 1)

Callie similarly found herself as an editor of the high school yearbook and often took charge of other school group projects and clubs or sports teams. Since beginning their teaching careers, these women have continued to find themselves or be offered leadership roles. Amanda currently acts as the AVID coordinator at her school site as well as the instructional coach for new teachers. As previously mentioned, Callie has always been a large school club sponsor whether it was student council or her current role as the Link Crew teacher and sponsor. Dian has served as a department co-chair as well as has led district training sessions on culturally relevant teaching. Ruth serves as a current representative for the school district's education association. These opportunities and experiences testify to the leadership skills the participants have in common that also enable them to effectively steer their classrooms.

Humor.

Humor also plays a large role in these women's classrooms, how they interact with their students, and how they present themselves. They don't take themselves too seriously, an important trait for a high school teacher. Although the women all manifest their comedy in different ways, they've found a way to connect to their students with levity and fun.

Dian is a prime example of this. Everyday her whiteboard displays a joke of the day and her first line of discipline for students is often a humorous glare which students laugh at, but also get back on task, taking the hint. During one of my observations, before the bell had even rung, Dian's fun personality was on display with her students.

> Student: I need to go to the bathroom
>
> Dian: Well don't you look handsome [observing the student dressed in a suit and tie]. You better run in your little handsome suit then. (Observation 1)

The lesson continued with an introduction to some essays written by Sojourner Truth. Dian clarifies for the students that at an event that Truth spoke at she is called a man, and Truth's response is to open her blouse. "How awesome is that?! No one does this, she's like, 'I'm a man?!' Boom shaka laka looks at these breasts" (Observation 1).

At the end of the lesson, Dian had the students create a symbol to represent Truth, and then discuss with the class why that symbol is accurate. After all the presentations, Dian took out a few drawings claiming that she's been doing this activity for a while and has kept her favorite ones. Using the document camera, she showed the papers. One is a cow with censored utters, another displays Lebron James in makeup because "she tall and

strong." Dian displayed another that she told her students was explained as a podium, "They meant well," she said, placing the drawing on the camera. It's clearly a phallic symbol. The students clapped in pleasure and audibly laughed. The final symbol was that of a tampon, because "it's strong and men are afraid of them." This interaction between Dian and her students clearly shows Dian's brazen personality and unabashed ability to be real with her students and use humor in conjunction with learning.

Ruth is also able to take teenage humor in stride. I remember discovering the inevitable phallic drawing one day while teaching high school juniors on a meticulously crafted bulletin board. My reaction: interrogate every single student who sat within a 10-foot radius if they were possibly responsible, then annoyedly carve out the image and replace it with clean unmarked butcher paper. Ruth's reaction: "One of my students had drawn you know genitalia… on my wall. And I just... I have to be like 'no,' but I kind of think it's funny... And I'll say something like, 'well that's not even to scale!'" (Ruth, Interview 2). Ruth told me this as she also relayed that a part of her job is not taking things too seriously, and often she is challenged to not laugh at the students when they're hilarious, but probably inappropriate or off topic. She also told me that she often brags to her colleagues about the hilarious things her students do in her classroom because it makes the job fun, "I have to share because it was witty and funny and I'm proud of them" (Interview 2).

Amanda displays a constant back and forth exchange with her students full of smart quips and humorous remarks. Amanda's humor is based more in nuanced references or satirical tones that her students seem to appreciate. Such an example was

recorded during my second observation when Amanda told her students who were working in pairs to provide one another with feedback, “Allow your shoulder partner to give you praise or condemnation, whatever they feel in their hearts.” Many students smiled at this remark. At another point in the lesson, Amanda asked her students what they would do if they won 25 million dollars. One student smugly made a remark about taxes to which Amanda had to clarify. Another student talked about paying off debts, “What are you, fifty?” Amanda responded. The students laughed, me included (Amanda, Observation 2). These subtle exchanges demonstrate Amanda’s ability to bring fun into her classroom through a comic and easy-going rapport with her students.

Callie’s classroom is equally as dynamic and fun in her humorous exchanges with her students. During a discussion about how students can earn service hours she told her students, “you have to prove to me what you did. If you’re making Tamales, fabulous--first of all, I want one, and I also want a picture of you in the kitchen with your mom” (Callie, Observation 2). Callie’s classroom activities also exemplify her desire to have fun and comedy in the classroom, again as seen by the *Pride and Prejudice* line dancing activity to which Callie admitted to doing mostly because she thought it was hilarious, “And it was the funniest thing. And I was dying laughing and then by the end they were dying laughing. And that was one of the funniest things. I have it on video because I was like, this is just so priceless” (Callie, Interview 2). This sub-thread is consistent with the interviews conducted by Bobek (2002) who also discovered that a good sense of humor was a leading factor to teacher resiliency and therefore retention.

Content passion/ love for learning and teaching.

Another unifying commonality of these teachers' personalities is their passion for the English content area as well as for learning and teaching in general. All of the participants spoke at length about their early attachment to books and literature. With the exception of Ruth, the participants also had a personal affinity and enthusiasm for composition. These early year passions eventually transferred to their English teaching careers. Amanda and Ruth spoke about the empathy that literature teaches us. All of the participants use texts to show their students that there are messages that the authors intend for their readers:

> Amanda: So, since he doesn't propose a solution, he's just showing that it sucks to be poor, why is he writing this?
>
> Student: To show what poverty is like?
>
> Amanda: OK and if you understand it what are you more likely to do?
>
> Student: Do something about it. (Amanda, Observation 2)

Ruth loves the way that literature can speak to her students in a way they've never heard about before, "I really loved [teaching] humanities...I mean some of the kids said it felt like therapy sometimes because we were talking about all these wonderful ideas that they'd never been exposed to" (Ruth, Interview 1).

Dian loves the connection to her students that the English content area allows, "I truly think that English teachers. Are the ones that get to know their students the best. Because we're the ones that get to hear their stories" (Interview 1). Ruth spoke about this phenomenon as well:

> But I'm an English teacher. I kinda want that to happen...we want that kind of discussion of you know, this is what the character was going through, or this is how the story, or this is what was going on at the time that the author was living or whatever. And then within the literature we can talk about just about anything. I don't know if a science or a math teacher has the same kind of freedom and I don't know how that happens in other classes. (Interview 2)

These teachers love the freedom that their content area has built in, the ability to connect with students on a deeper, more philosophical and personal level. Callie spoke about how the English curriculum allows her students to make discoveries and teach her things that she hadn't seen before.

> I remember a Hamlet Socratic seminar; it was like my second year of teaching. And I still remember it because I remember sitting back like, I learned so much stuff about Shakespeare and about Hamlet from that Socratic seminar from my students... they just saw things in a completely different perspective that I had never seen. They're all like 'oh Ophelia is manipulative' and I'm like 'what she's a victim!' They're like 'No, she is the worst!' (Callie, Interview 2)

Amanda is also passionate about the co-learning process. She enjoys "meaning making" and the opportunity to learn alongside her students, which is something that the English discipline allows for. "They teach me because they have insights into the text or into the process I didn't have. So, my best days teaching are days when we create meaning together, when we construct meaning together, when we discover things together...there

are so many opportunities for insight and so many fresh, fresh moments" (Amanda, Interview 2).

Dian's passion for the content area is heightened by her ability to share it with her students. When she teaches a Holocaust unit, she spoke about how important it is for her to create an experience where the students can essentially walk in the characters' shoes and realize "that you've got it pretty good." "The kids are crying. I'm crying. You know I want them to have the same experience with me that I had with Miss Briscoe" (Dian, Interview 1). Dian reveals here that some of this passion was passed down from a previous English teacher--another thing that the other participants seemed to have in common: positive experiences with past English teachers or classes.

Additionally, Dian feels that her content area has the power to make a real impact in the world. Again, when speaking about her Holocaust unit, Dian remarked:

> I teach this to honor their [Holocaust victims] stories. So, again the kids need to know this isn't just theory. It's not just a book. These aren't just theoretical people, and I said if we continue the way that we're going, it's going to be real close to another genocide because people are starting to not care about their fellow human beings on this soil. I'd never in my life thought that we would be seeing Americans you know doing the hail Hitler and parading around with swastikas. I cannot wrap my brain around that. So, I try to use my passion to combat the bad that's in the world. (Interview 2)

Callie also expressed the fulfillment that comes with sharing real-world impact connected to the content area. She told me that the pinnacle of her teaching career thus far was the

ability to take her kids to the Holocaust museum in Los Angeles. The shared experience of introducing her students to new insights and understanding, “this is like the thing that I am the most proud of, was getting these kids on this trip and giving them that experience that they wouldn't have had otherwise” (Callie, Interview 2).

Identity.

More than a job, teaching has become an identity to these women. The core of who they are is that of a teacher and educator. Danielewicz (2014) claims that becoming a good teacher is more than methodology and pedagogy but an “engagement with identity” (p. 3). She continues that it must become a state of being and how people conceive of themselves so that it is not merely acting or behaving in a certain role. To fully become a true teacher, one cannot simply adopt a role but must “construct an identity as a teacher.” Along with Danielewicz, I also argue that the creation of a teaching identity contributes to career competency which then contributes to teacher retention (Bobek, 2002).

Leaving behind something that has become an integral part of one’s self is an extremely hard thing to do. While I was only in the field for five years, this was one of my biggest struggles-- the person I had come to identify myself as was first, and foremost, a teacher. At the time of my leaving, this identity component was larger than almost anything else--wife, sister, friend, daughter, future mother. The thing that made it a little easier was leaving the door ajar, knowing that I was leaving to continue a pursuit in the education field that could lead me back to the classroom in some form. The

participants in this study all vocalized a strong connection of their teaching selves to their identity compositions.

Ruth is a good example of this concept. On our very first meeting, as earlier recounted, she told me that someone couldn't talk to her for more than a few minutes without knowing that she's a teacher. It's such an internalized component of who she is that it surfaces at almost any interaction. When asked what the teaching profession means to her, Ruth responded:

> It's my identity. It's within about two minutes of me talking to somebody ...they'll know I'm a teacher...It has allowed me to be more creative than I ever thought I would. It has allowed me to grow as a person. I think that I wouldn't be who I am, what I am now without teaching. So, what does teaching mean to me? I don't know what I would do if I couldn't teach...It is such a visceral part of me. (Interview 2)

To Ruth, it is clear that teaching is more than how she defines her career but how she defines herself. This is a conscious recognition that she seems to have as well. More recently she told me that once she started teaching, she realized she had been a teacher her whole life.

Callie told me that the role of a teacher encompasses guidance counselor, friend, parent, mentor, and while it's not something that teachers have to do, it's something that the good ones choose to do because it's just who they are, "I do all the things. I always do all the things. I enjoy doing all the things like I do. I wouldn't be content being like the clock in clock and out teacher. That's just not in my nature" (Interview 2). "When people

become teachers, it's more than a job" (Interview 2), she told me, it's a chosen path in life that is all encompassing. Callie also spoke to an interesting component of teaching identity in that there's such a strong sense of personal connection to the profession, that the thoughts of deserting it are filled with guilt and confusion.

> It's weird because that's the dumbest thing on the planet. You know what I mean, like you shouldn't feel that way because in no other line of work would you ever feel that way. Like if my sister stopped nursing tomorrow that like her fellow nurses are gonna be like 'How dare you!' you know? But in education it is. It's this weird like...Yeah, it's like being in war or something where you're like deserter How dare you... and it's so dumb it shouldn't be like that, but it is it is.

In this conversation Callie also mentioned how conversations with former teaching colleagues revealed the same truth, that they felt guilty for leaving the "trenches" of the teaching field. It was clear to me from this exchange that while Callie is actively entertaining thoughts of leaving the teaching profession, it is a hugely emotional and personal struggle because of this professional identity bond that becomes constructed when teaching, especially when teaching well.

Even Amanda acknowledged how her identity and perceptions of self are often hinged to her teaching career. When asked what her profession means to her, she replied that it "pretty much means everything" (Interview 2). She told me that her mood is connected to what is going on in the classroom.

> How much of how I feel when I wake in the morning is tied to what's happening in the classroom and I don't consciously think every day teaching means so much

> to me but it clearly does because it affects so much of how I feel about my life and my personhood and my identity… I remember it was only a few years ago that I realized that I really, really realized and acknowledged that I need my students...My identity is really predicated on the give and take that I have with my students which is so weird. I'm not a person who feels comfortable being vulnerable in any way. And so, so that was just a really weird realization. It's interesting. (Amanda, Interview 2)

Amanda also strongly associates herself with an identity of learning. Her life philosophy is that "if you're not learning, you're not living" (Interview 1). It only makes sense that teaching is equally valued and personally associated with Amanda's identity with such a fierce view on the vitalness of learning.

Dian claims that she didn't choose teaching, but that it chose her (Interview 2). To her, it was truly a calling and what she was put on this earth to do. Dian also sees her role as a teacher as a mentor, educator, role model, friend, mother, social worker, and protector. She will do whatever is required to "keep my kids safe" (Interview 2). When asked about the importance of her profession, she responded that it's her life. "This is the most important profession in the world...this is my calling and it is a noble calling. It is exhausting it is rewarding, it is fulfilling. It is terrifying. But at the end of the day I would not trade it for the world" (Interview 2). Dian also feels very tied to the content that she teaches, she claimed that "just who I am" works perfectly for teaching multicultural literature. Dian loves sharing people's diverse stories and honoring them. Her role as a facilitator of learning and sharing stories, especially your own is what led her to become

an “East Meadow Wonder Woman” something that is so closely tied to her identity that it’s on the nameplate outside her classroom door.

Thread 5: Students First

The final and most significant thread I found amongst these teachers is their commitment to their students. Again, the adage that teaching isn’t about “teaching a subject, but rather it’s about teaching students,” rings 100 percent true with this group of women. After the first interviews and observations, I knew that they were in it for the kids.

> I was called to do this job, and I’m going to do it as best as I can. I'm going to be the best teacher that I can. I'm going to read as much as I can. I'm going to research, but it's going to be the way that I want to do it not because I'm going to get extra credit for it or not because I'm gonna get a plaque for it or whatever, it's because I want to do it for the kids (Dian, Interview 2).

During my time as a secondary teacher, it became clear to me that you can’t go into the profession because you love the content area--yes, that helps to be good and passionate about what you’re teaching--but in order to really succeed and love what you do, it’s not about loving *what* you teach, but loving *who* you teach. In fact, I was told that if I loved reading, then I should be a math teacher since English teachers are too tired from reading all of the student essays to go home and read for pleasure. The satisfaction of a teaching career truly has to be a focus on the students first, and this is something I saw so abundantly clear in my group of extraordinary participants.

Love for students/ student rapport.

I could probably fill this dissertation with stories and examples of the efforts I witnessed and heard during my data collection, but I will attempt to consolidate these to ones that most clearly demonstrate the teachers' dedication to their pupils or "kids" as they mostly refer to them. Additionally, many of the vignettes seen between chapters help to share the stories of these teachers and the experiences they have shared with their students. During my first observation of Ruth, she had her creative writing students write about themselves with a superpower. One student wrote about wanting to have more charisma and empathy so they could help individuals genuinely feel better about what they were going through. "First off, I want to thank this person for revealing this part of themselves" Ruth said to the class. She then has everyone put their heads down and asks for the author of the paper to put their thumb up if it was okay to reveal who she was. Ruth's rapport with her students is positive and demonstrates respect.

Ruth also composed a superpower story alongside her students, her superpower: believing in her kids. An excerpt from her story reads: "MY STUDENTS HAVE EXCELLENT WRITING SKILLS, AND THEY KNOW I CARE ABOUT THEIR SUCCESS! ONE TEST DOESN'T MATTER! THEY WILL SUCCEED BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN THEM!" (Ruth, Observation 1, Field texts). During our first interview, Ruth told me that her profession is exhausting, and not because she has to be at work at 7am or because she has to manage the health and well-being of 150 people every day while simultaneously teaching them concepts of English Language Arts, but because "we

hold all these kids in our heads... and it takes up our brains." There is a never-ending stream of worry and concern for the students in her classroom.

Ruth's students know she cares as well. In a folder she keeps close to her desk labeled "Reasons I teach" holds a series of mementos, pictures, drawings, and letters collected throughout the years. One letter from the folder addressed to Ruth says, "You taught me that instead of saying how I feel, I can also write it out and that helped by letting people understand who I am. You also helped me realize who I was and what I could do by telling me I can do whatever I put my mind to" (Interview 2). Ruth responded to this note after having read it aloud to me by saying that it's really more about her attitude than anything else, "The feeling that you know, they can be who they are. And that, they are going to be something... even if they don't know what that is yet."

Callie told me that the most important factor of her job that most personally affects her, is her students, "that directly impacts my every single day is how my students are and how they... interact and their goals and their aspirations and why they're coming to school and things like that, like that's absolutely important to me, ten out of ten" (Interview 2). Callie remembers the kids most that she works with daily in an out of school in the numerous clubs she has sponsored. She remembers the kids who are "dealing with personal struggles," and feel comfortable enough to open up to her about them. "I had a girl a couple of years ago who was really...battling depression and suicidal thoughts and all sorts of things, and we had to really work with her to get her to a place ... where she could come to school and feel safe, and so I remember her" (Interview 2). She told me stories about past students who came to her wedding, who she still meets up with

at Comicon or the gym. Callie said that her favorite role as a teacher is the ability to really connect with kids and help them through whatever it is that they need, “Not every teacher is really good at connecting with kids. I actually like helping them understand things about life in a real way and in a way that applies to them. I think that's my strength” (Callie, Interview 2).

Callie also has a folder of notes and mementos from past students (in fact, all the participants do in some form, which were shared with me), one teacher appreciation note reads: “You are by far the youngest and coolest teacher I’ve ever had. You are such a nerd. I am so glad that you became my teacher. Now I actually pay attention and learn...The fact that you can rap makes everything interesting” (Interview 2). Callie told me that by far her favorite part of teaching was the students and interacting with teenagers,

> It’s fun being around younger people. They keep me young and we joke around a lot. I like to have a fun environment...I try to emulate those teachers I had in school. The ones that actually cared about what was going on in my day and wanted to make their students laugh...that is absolutely my favorite part about teaching is just hanging out with kids and hearing their stories and how funny and ridiculous they can be. It’s fun. (Interview 1)

Not all teachers feel this way, Callie said, and could impact their retention. She mentioned the importance of putting students before the content area to really be adequately fit for the job, “I think some teachers that I’ve worked with who have left...are very academic but not necessarily like personable...so they get into teaching because

they...like books but then they get into teenagers and they're like 'oh, I don't like teenagers'" (Interview 2).

While Amanda is less vocal about her emotional attachment to her students, it's very clear that she has a strong rapport with her students and puts their learning, and them as people, as the top priority in the classroom. During her realization that her identity was strongly tied to her profession, she acknowledged that it's mostly tied to her students. She doesn't just enjoy her students but rather "needs" them (Interview 2). In a call and repeat attention getter with her students, Amanda called out, "I say 'Love', you say 'You'! Love!" And the students called back "You!" "I love you too!" Amanda replied to the student laughter (Observation 2). Teaching is more than the learning process for Amanda--though she heavily emphasizes that--it's about the students. At the very conception of the idea of becoming a teacher, students were at the front of her mind, "when I was in high school and college I used to fantasize about being a teacher and I used to think about what it would be like and I would imagine myself saying. 'I'm working with people your age because I really care about you'" (Interview 2). I asked Amanda if she still feels this way, her response, "Now, more than ever."

Dian wears her affection and devotion to her students on her sleeve, "My kids are the reason I teach...They're the ones that keep me coming back every day" (Interview 1). Dian's reservoir of significant and powerful moments and interactions with students is overflowing, and the evidence of the extent to which she will go to for her students is astoundingly clear. She shared with me graduation, learning, and heartfelt moments she has shared with her students throughout her career that consistently exemplify the priority

Dian places on her students learning but also well-being. One such example was the pillow she would bring to school so that a student could nap in her classroom during lunch when he had no other safe place to do so.

> He was in such a horrible place, he said Miss, I keep a gun under my pillow-- and I mean he would always fall asleep in my class. So, I let him during lunch, I said just sleep here. And so, I had a pillow, I had a blanket for him, and to this day he still keeps in touch with me. He went into the Army and is just the greatest kid ever. And they're all great. You know it's just, hear their stories. That's what it's about. And so, I just, I love it. I love my life. I love my kids. (Interview 1)

Dian told me about how she makes an effort to "ooh and ahh" over each graduation announcement that a student gives her because "it's a big deal to them and they're sharing it for a reason." She puts together a goody bag for the senior students at graduation time with school-color beads and souvenir tassels, "I'll give them to my kids, again, just to let them know that I'm proud of you....again twenty one years worth of memories and they all just kind of get muddled in my head, but they're the reason why I keep coming back" (Interview 2).

Dian will spend time far after the contract hours have passed by to talk with students and help them with whatever they need, such as the case with the Italian foreign exchange student who was homesick and just needed a friendly ear, "sometimes it's not the great big moments, it's just the intimate moments when I can connect with them one way and just make that human connection" (Interview 2). At the conclusion of our second interview at a coffee shop a few hours after school had ended, Dian told me she

had to run back to the school. “I have to go see one of my students in her volleyball game, she wanted me to see her play. I love my boos” she said, using another term of affection to describe her students. “I want my legacy to be that Miss [Dian] truly loved her kids” (Interview 2).

Impact.

For these participants, the conscious decision to become a teacher wasn’t motivated by money, self-interest, or convenience, but instead was largely based on the footprints that could be left behind. As said by Dian, teaching is a “noble calling,” and without teachers there wouldn’t be “doctors or lawyers or anything else. We are shaping the world” (Interview 2). These participants are motivated to teach because they believe it is one of the most valuable contributions to society and that it truly matters; their work in some way is making a difference for the better and for the greater good of their communities. I posit that this intrinsic belief in their personal social impact is strongly tied to the participants’ notions of self-purpose and consequently career retention.

Callie echoed the feeling that teachers are invaluable.

> They create all other professions. Teachers in my life led me to become a teacher. I mean, I think a lot of kids, their life path is carved out while they're in high school-- who they're going to be and what they're going to accomplish. And oftentimes it's inspired by teachers that they have, or you know ‘oh I love my psychology class, I love my psychology teacher, so I got into psychology.’ Like stuff happens in high school. I didn't choose teaching because of teachers but I

> chose English because of teachers, because my English teachers that I had and all the way back to like junior high. So, I think it's super important. (Interview 2)

Ruth also commented on the significance of teachers, “I mean without teachers you don’t have an education” (Interview 2). Even Amanda, who vocalized that she never intended to have any kind of impact cannot ignore how special she feels the profession to be.

> Learning is so essential to survival, like almost more essential than anything beyond our bodily needs. It's so essential to survival and I'm the conduit for that...and this bond that you build because of learning together, is kind of unbreakable in a way. And I know that might seem to contradict what I said about not reflecting back on my former students because I don't really... but if they were to come into my life in a significant way in the future, I feel like that bond would be reignited like immediately. And it's always there. (Interview 2)

I think it’s important to add that Amanda did mention that while she doesn’t reflect back on former students often, it’s because “my current students are so much in my mind and there's so much in my heart.”

Callie and Ruth also both chose teaching because of the idea that it would enable them to make a difference in other people’s lives.

> I thought, well what is a job where when you can graduate you're going to be guaranteed to get that job but you still have that voice you still have, that you're able to make an impact on people, you're able to help people. And I thought school, like education, you know, how many kids can I potentially influence? (Callie, Interview 1)

After the 9/11 tragedy, Ruth had a moment of reckoning where she felt that if something were to happen to her at that moment, she would have no legacy. She wouldn't have left anything significant behind. To her, the answer was to get into teaching with the potential of positively affecting students' lives. Ruth shared with me a classroom experience when she assigned her senior students to write a letter to a teacher who impacted them, and one student had a particular request.

> He took me aside and... he said Miss, ...Does it have to be a teacher who's living? And I was like, what do you mean? ... I think it was his kindergarten teacher, or his first-grade teacher, I don't remember, but she had died since, and he wanted to write a letter to her. I said well, what if you wrote a letter to her family and told her family what she meant to him. He goes, Oh OK. And then --this is what made me cry--he reaches into his wallet, takes out her obituary that he's kept in his wallet for all of this time. Now, I don't know many teenagers who do that...So that is somebody who has impacted his life...And when I thought about it, I'm in a profession that does that... So that's why I keep this letter. To remind me that you know, it's not just those moments but that it is potentially a lifetime I'm affecting their lives, and... sometimes it comes back viscerally that these lives are affected...The kids I teach. Knowing that they need me, that's why I teach... So that's why I continue...maybe someday a kid's gonna carry my obituary in his wallet...That's why I keep doing what I do...knowing that...I've shaped somebody's life. (Interview 2)

As seen in the above example with Ruth, in addition to the impact that teachers have on student learning and future career paths, these teachers also desire to impact students through their emotional well-being or assist them in that teenage rite-of-passage quest. And even Amanda, who may not vocally have an intentional goal to leave a mark, "it was never my goal to have an impact...It was never my goal for them to remember me, to feel like I had made a difference in their lives" (Interview 2), the tokens collected and stored throughout their classroom careers tell a story that they clearly all did. As mentioned, each participant had a sort of "time-capsule" where they gathered some of their most prized possessions from teaching. These items included student pictures, letters, cards, drawings, stuffed animals, and more. Each item came with a story that the participants explained to me, these collections made it obvious that these teachers had impacted at least a handful of students--if not hundreds or thousands--and that the students have also affected them.

One such example comes from Callie:

> I had a student who has anxiety, and really early on I was given a heads up, so I made it very clear to her, I said 'I also have anxiety. I take medication for it. I know exactly what you're dealing with on a regular basis.' And so, I was really candid about it. And I never let it be an excuse for her... she'd always tell me about how she has this presentation or, 'I got this or that or the other thing' and I'd go, 'OK cool. I came to work today, and I taught, you've got to push through it.' And when I would come across articles or a book or something about anxiety, I would share it with her. Anyway, she wrote me this letter:

> ‘You were the only teacher I felt that I've ever related to. Ever since my sophomore year, I never thought I would make it, not because of grades but because of my depression. I've had my lows and my highs during high school. Even if I wanted to die or I wanted it to end, I stuck through it. I thought that my senior year would suck until I met [you]. You gave me a different view on life. Made me want to live even on my darkest days.’
>
> So, I keep that on my wall, because that's awesome. And what other profession are you going to get that? You're not going to get that working as a bank teller. It's...just not going to happen. (Interview 2)

Callie told me that she wanted her legacy to be that the students knew she cared about them. She talked about an award that the district sends out to teachers every year which is named “You Touched the Future” and means that a graduating senior named you as their most influential teacher during all their years in school. She said that pretty much every year she has received one, “It’s pretty cool, that to me, is a legacy” (Interview 2).

In Amanda’s iCloud folder of pictures she has kept throughout the years, reads a note that says:

> I feel like this little card won’t be enough. I was extra blessed to see you every day for at least one semester this year!...Thank you for always being there to talk to. I know I can genuinely trust you with absolutely everything and anything! Thank you for also always believing in me and supporting my endeavors! (Interview 2, field texts)

Another note in her picture gallery is scrawled on a torn piece of lined paper written in pink pen, “Hello! I have questions! Do you know where me and my mom can get help with food? We are struggling and we don’t know who to talk to.” Apparently, Amanda is someone this student felt she could talk to. Amanda told me that her goal is for students to learn something every day and that they might feel “elevated and empowered” for having spent an hour in her class Monday through Friday. I asked Amanda if that wasn’t considered an impact in some way, that the students left with a little more than what they came in with, to which she responded, “Absolutely” (Interview 2).

Ruth shared an experience during a faculty meeting where she realized that she personally, not just her colleague next door, is needed and valuable and is making a difference, “Nobody else has my experiences. Nobody else can give what I have given. That's not to say nobody else is validated or valued. But they need me to do this” (Interview 2). She mentioned that in addition to students, her legacy includes perpetuating the positive culture of the school for the teachers that come behind her. In Ruth’s box of keepsakes is a note from a student that discusses how she never used to read before Ruth’s class, but now, she does, “I just wanted to say thanks for all you do, you have changed my out-look on wanting to read. I used to refuse to read at all. Now, well, just the other day I caught myself reading a book instead of watching TV or something…” (Interview 2, field texts). Motivating a student to learn the power of language and actually enjoy reading is probably one of the greatest successes and impacts an English teacher will ever have. Christopher Crowe (1999) comments on the need for

introducing books to “reluctant readers” in a way that doesn’t “kill it” (p. 114). Ruth was able to do that for this student.

Dian’s capsule included a picture of a group of students who she told me were from her very first Native American Literature class.

> I am so proud of these [kids]... one of my students went to our administration and asked if they could wear a feather in their tassels...the administration said no...everybody is graduating with the exact same cap and gown, the same tassel...This is not about individuality, this is about a class. And I understood what they were saying, but it was such a slap in the face...They have earned their eagle feather; this is a rite of passage for them. So, I told the kids, I said you fight for this. You want it, fight for it. So they got their parents involved and then like the next thing you know there's like 50 Native American parents pissed off in the front office saying you need to listen to our kids, you need to respect our culture...it went all the way up to the district and it went to the superintendent and...finally said OK, we understand now, you've made us understand the importance of the eagle feather. So only Native Americans can wear the eagle feather off their tassel. And I was so proud of them that they fought for something that they believed in and they won, and they truly realized that they had a voice. (Interview 2)

Dian clutched the photo of her former students as she recounted this story for me, the emotion was clear in her eyes. She also told me that the students then invited her to their feather ceremony on the reservation, which she described as a “walk in beauty.” She was

awarded an eagle feather as well and was told by the medicine man, “Native Americans have been put down for so long that we didn’t think that we mattered, but you are helping our future to understand that they matter. You’re giving them that voice” (Interview 2.

She then said that although she gets into trouble for it, she wears her eagle feather on her cap every year with her students. Additionally, Dian’s box contained countless affirming and heartfelt notes from students, a few teacher award plaques, and two funeral programs from students who passed away far before their time. She also had a note from a former student who she continues to keep in touch with who is battling cancer, this student wrote Dian a poem about a friend who sought the speaker’s advice on what teacher he should look for during his senior year. In the poem, the speaker says:

So, I sent them

I sent the few photos that I had

Her and I

Funny ones

Goofy ones

And then captioned it

“Her name is [Dian] ---

And I owe her my life” (Interview 2, field texts).

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Two of my students that I've stayed in touch with, [Garret and Erin] were a couple. Great kids from day one. They came to my daughter's baby shower...They both just graduated from college and they travel like crazy. They were in Jamaica, they went to Italy, they went to all these different places. They get cheap Airbnb's and just travel. And I finally messaged them one day and I was like, "Why is your life so dang cool?" And she goes, "because of you." And I was like, "What are you talking about? Like that has nothing to do with anything!" And she goes, "You said something in class one day which was basically that like, 'there will come a time when you've got to be real responsible and buckle down, you got to pay all those bills, and so you got to try to do as much as you can when you can.'" And she said, "You always talked about how travel eliminated ignorance and how the best way to educate yourself was through travel. So, me and [Garret] made this goal that we would try to hit up as many places as possible before we got married and had kids." So, they've traveled to like six different countries because it's something that I had said in like a casual conversation in English class. So that was pretty awesome. Really pretty cool.

-Callie, Interview 2

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CHAPTER 6

A NARRATIVE RESOLUTION

"Thought flows in terms of stories–stories about events, stories about people, and stories about intentions and achievements. The best teachers are the best story-tellers. We learn in the form of stories." -Frank Martin

Summary of the Research Problem, Significance, and Intentions

I began teaching secondary ELA with a determination to make a difference and be the best teacher for my students that I could be. However, after only five years in the field I became part of the statistic of educators who leave within the first half-decade. Despite the discrepancies in the studies and statistics, we know that teacher attrition--especially amongst newer-to-teaching teachers--is high. The stories of those who go are often the only ones that we hear, especially in the state of Arizona, which has reached landmark attrition rates leaving classrooms without qualified teachers (Hunting, 2017).

The existing body of literature abundantly covers the topic of teacher flight and offers insight into the facets of attrition. But what about those who stay? The research is largely lacking at examining the other side of the issue: teacher retention. Study after study can be found on the multiple facets of teacher attrition, but seldom focus on the factors that lead to teacher retention. This study strives to fill that gap and address the question of what helps to keep teachers in the classroom; why do teachers stay?

By examining the counter narrative of this issue, I desired to uncover additional insights and knowledge into the attrition crisis. In order to do so, this study focused on the stories of the teachers in the secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classroom who

have decided to remain in the profession. Through narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method focused on story, this study examined four experienced teachers' narrative perceptions about the conditions and motivations that have shaped their decision to remain in the classroom beyond five years. Indisputably, the teaching profession is one of the most valuable cornerstones to a progressive and effective society. However, research shows that teachers leaving the classroom most hurts students. Specifically, teacher turnover most affects schools serving students from lower socio-economic and ethnic minority backgrounds/households, widening the achievement gap (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Furthermore, while schools are losing teachers, not enough are entering the profession to fill the vacancies (Hunting, 2017).

It is important to understand what motivates teachers to be in the classroom so that we can continue to make progress and take measures to keep them there. Narrative inquiry research has the ability to inspire this progress. According to Robert McKee, "storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today." Supporting this belief, Clandinin (2012) states that narrative inquiry has the ability to influence policy, "if we have the policy makers listen to the stories we are trying to tell." Clandinin (2013) also discusses the importance of narrative inquiry in enabling change and allowing for a "possibility of shaping, or changing practice" (p. 36). My research allowed for teachers in the field to tell their stories about their teaching experiences and factors that have led to their decision to stay in the profession. From these stories, policy makers, educators, and academics might be able to glean new insights and knowledge leading to a more informed discourse on teacher retention.

As mentioned previously, teaching is more than a career, it is a life. In this inquiry, I looked into questions that are deeply personal and tied to my life experiences, just as Huber (2008) claimed to, "reconsider my narratives of experience and explore the stories I carried in me." This research puzzle is one of the stories I have carried in me. Using the frame of a "particular wonder" rather than thinking about initially forming a particular research question (Clandinin and Huber, 2010) and focusing on "a sense of continual reformulation" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124), I shared the narrative accounts that were delivered and observed by me in their intact form. Once the stories were gathered and re-storied, I then shared a thematic findings approach based on my own deductions and perceptions. Hopefully these insights will provide increased understanding, and new stories to the discourse on teacher retention. Rather than sharing the stories of those who have left, this dissertation shared the stories of those who have stayed. Through these stories of four high school English teachers who have stayed in the field, the following research questions were formed to create a frame in which to discuss these narratives: What do the teaching narratives of four secondary English teachers who have stayed in the field past five years reveal about teacher retention? What does each of the four teacher's story arc (teaching journey: past, present, future) reveal about retention?

Implications and Conclusions

As noted in chapter five, the conclusions I have reached are limited to my own understanding of the participants' accounts as well as my attempts to weave them together in order to spot common threads and trends amongst the stories. Nevertheless,

the intention of this study was never to arrive at definitive conclusions but rather to collect more representation from a side of the story--the counter-story (Kim, 2015)--that is often unheard, in hopes that it would contribute to a heightened and more informed conversation on the issue of teacher retention than what was previously presented.

Through the teacher accounts, several threads became apparent to me in response to contributing factors to retention. These teachers had personal and positive connections to either their schools or the colleagues they worked with as well as the students at their campuses they worked for (Bobek, 2002). Additionally, professional autonomy is an important trait to these women and something that their working conditions usually allow for. Bickmore & Bickmore (2010) also found autonomy to be an important factor of teacher satisfaction with their working environment when looking at the administration's role with the induction of novice teachers. Autonomy led their participants to feel "respected and encouraged to creatively explore instructional activities for their students" (p. 462).

These women are also effective in their teaching practice. Their classrooms are student-centered, and they hold their own practice and their students' progress to a high degree. They have confidence in their skills as educators and feel proficient in their professions. Amanda especially mentioned this notion of self-efficacy and teaching competency, "I think the only reason I stayed in teaching was because I did have a level of competence in teaching. And so, I did feel that it was a profession where I excelled in and that had a lot of value for me" (Amanda, Interview 2). This connection of teacher quality to retention is also noted through an empirical study by Krieg (2006) which found

that female teachers performing better in the classroom are less likely to leave. Their student-centered focus and high expectations for themselves and their students are also consistent with what can be considered "effective language arts instruction in urban schools" (L. Freeman, 2011). They fit the criteria found by Blasingame (2018) of displaying "love and advocacy for students, meeting the needs of students as individuals, respecting students' home culture in curriculum design and delivery of instruction, and passion for the job." All of these factors are apparent in their instructional practices.

External factors such as the participants' past work, education, and life experiences as well as their family situations and financial responsibilities also appear to play significant roles in their retention. Their past experiences have allowed them to be more competent and relevant instructors, and their home lives strongly impact their ability or decision to remain in the teaching career. These teachers also display unique personality traits that enable them to organize and lead their classrooms efficiently, enjoy student humor (Bobek, 2002), and love the learning process. Remarkably, teaching has also extended to more than a unit of their resumes but is a unit of their identities (Danielewicz, 2014). Lastly, these participants seem to place students before all other motivating factors of their professions. They are in it for the kids they work with. This finding holds consistent to the survey of over 100 Arizona teachers on primary motivation for continued teaching (Luszeck, 2018). The development and impacts on these students is more important to them than any other professional factor including personal advancement and financial compensation.

Beyond the Research Question

However, that is not to say that these teachers have student-rose-colored glasses on. Their interviews and narratives strongly reflect the awareness of teaching trials and negatives that are constant burdens on their professional lives. All teachers reflected to some degree a sense of feeling socially under-valued and disrespected for the skills and education that they have, “I definitely get that vibe from the general public like you’re just glorified babysitters…” (Callie, Interview 2). Ruth discussed about how the public respect may be there abstractly but not in the ways that matter, they still vote for politicians that actively try to “sabotage” beneficial change for teachers and the state of education (Interview, 2). Callie reiterated this notion about what needs to be done for teachers:

> Respect them. Make them feel honored and valuable in your words and your votes. I think I mean honestly a lot of it comes down to politics and voting and getting the right people in office who understand how public education works which is just in our state that's just not happening. Well, also just vocally supporting people and like not tearing them down is a big thing, paying them what they're worth. (Interview 2)

Dian, who is in constant fear that the primary thing she values-- the agency to make the decisions she deems best for her students and instructional practice--might be taken away discussed how teachers need to be trusted and respected.

> Just treat us like the professionals that we are...When you tell us that we can't be true to ourselves and when we have to teach in lockstep. Or you're going to fine

> us ...Do we have bad teachers? Yeah, we do. We have bad everything. But let's focus on the positives. And help us to want to stay in the profession. Because every year it gets harder to want to do this. And again, it is not because of the kids. It's because of the way everybody else treats us. (Interview 2)

Amanda went so far as to say that she didn't feel like teaching was a career--because it isn't socially structured to be one. Teaching is a profession, but there's no advancement which hinders professional growth opportunities and validation. For the years of experience and education that Amanda has, she feels "shafted" in terms of financial compensation. While she is grateful for what she has and acknowledges that it's much more than what other teachers are earning, she still feels like at this point in her life it "should be so much better than this." Additionally, Amanda discussed how unqualified and uncertified teachers are filling the classroom vacancies because the overall public perception of teaching just isn't attractive anymore to the individuals that could truly succeed as a teacher, "I do feel that Arizona needs to wake up because we have warm bodies teaching in the classroom. And the reason that we do is because people need more validation and that is partly salary" (Interview 2).

Nevertheless, while these teachers aren't oblivious to the factors that lead to high attrition rates, it seems that at least for them, thus far, their personal thresholds have not been met. To this point in their careers (except for perhaps Callie), the threads for remaining in their professions outweigh the issues that could cause them to leave.

Omitted Data

To add to the previous discussion, during my review and analysis of the interview

transcripts, there were several descriptive codes that I chose to omit from the findings of this study because they didn't fit with the idea of "what makes these teachers stay in the classroom?"--most of this data were negative experiences/stories with students or teaching struggles in general. I labeled these codes as "teaching needs," "teaching negatives," and "negative experiences with students/ teachers." One such story came from Dian who told me that in her beginning years of teaching she would handwrite every single one of her students a personal letter at the end of the year, "I had like a class that just broke my heart. I just loved them so much. And it was the end of the year. I used to handwrite all my kids at the end of the year, and just, and have again those little moments just between us" (Interview 2). This last day of class Dian gave her students an opportunity to eat food, socialize, and sign yearbooks while she worked on submitting final grades.

> [One student] got bored after 10 minutes and so he took my little letter that I wrote to him and he folded it up into a paper airplane and sailed it to the kid across from him and he hit somebody else. So that kid was like, 'Oh yeah.' So, he folds up my letter I wrote to him and throws it to another kid. And pretty soon I have thirty-five of my letters flying back and forth from the classroom. And then all this time... I just kept on typing and I didn't show any emotion...Then they got bored with you know throwing their little paper airplanes, so they took my little letters and their little airplanes and waded them up into like little snowballs and started chucking them at each other. So... like three minutes before the bell rang, I was never going to see these kids again,...they picked up all of

> their trash and they threw it away and just waited for my last words. So, I stood by the door and I looked all my kids in the eyes, and I said, 'I want you guys to know that because of this class, I will never write another letter to a student again.' And I walked out and I went into the bathroom and I cried. And so, I felt bad leaving the kids that way, but I needed them to understand that they really hurt me. (Interview 2)

I include this discussion, and particularly this story, because I think it's important to note that even the teachers who stay, have really, really hard days. Teaching isn't any easier for these teachers than it is for the ones who decide to leave, but they have certain qualities and factors surrounding their careers as highlighted in this study that enable them to be resilient and push past those moments.

Several months after the interviews were concluded and this dissertation was nearly complete, I had an opportunity to visit with Dian and Ruth in Dian's classroom at the start of the following school year. They told me it was a good thing I interviewed them at the end of the previous semester because the start of the current school year had been anything but easy. The school changed their bell schedule so that only one lunch occurred, meaning all 3,000 plus students were out of class at one time corralled to the outside courtyards since the academic buildings are locked during that time. In Arizona's 110-degree Augusts and Septembers, that is fuel for disaster. Gang fights, bomb threats, stolen security golf carts, and teachers requiring tetanus shots due to encounters with unruly students are just a few of the events they related to me.

"So, how do you get past that?" I incredulously asked them.

"The kids are never enough of a reason for us to quit," replied Dian.

Ruth spoke about how the truly "sucky" kids are few and far in-between, at most one or two a year. She stated that the faculty lunchroom was the greatest professional development, it was where they laughed and cried and were able to see that they weren't alone in their experiences. "We've been teaching long enough to know that tomorrow is a new day, so let's just reset" said Dian. Ruth talked about looking back at some of those very negative experiences and just being able to laugh at them. Even in the moment, they've learned to just laugh and not take things coming from students personally.

"Most of the time it has nothing to do with you, they're just using you as a flash point because you're there," said Dian. Ruth said that this is a mantra they teach the novice teachers, "it's not you, it's not you." Dian mentioned how they know their students come from such hard lives, and often what they bring into the classroom is the residue from the things they deal with at home. I told them how it's obvious they have a strong degree of maturity to understand this concept and not take the student out-lashes personally. Dian and Ruth looked at each other and then laughed at the word "mature." I tried again by saying they have "teaching wisdom." Again, they laughed. This encounter alone demonstrates some of those unique aspects of the teachers who decide to--and are emotionally able to--stay in the teaching profession. They have built a community with one other, they truly empathize with and know their students, and they laugh.

What Can We Learn? What Can We Add?

This research, grounded in the narratives of four secondary ELA teachers, adds to the existing body of research on what is happening that *keeps* teachers in the field.

Instead of asking the teacher who left why they left, this dissertation focuses on components of why teachers stay. These factors can be beneficial to teacher education programs and school district professional development programs to more clearly identify what elements should be accentuated and reinforced to ensure that our teachers stay in the field. Of course, not all of these factors can be coached or taught-- our teacher education programs cannot groom prospective teachers to have certain personality traits or diverse background experiences. Nevertheless, some things can be done. Pre-service education programs can provide for more field experiences that allow pre-service teachers to really interact with students and realize that the students are the keystone to the profession. A greater emphasis can be put on the importance of teacher dispositions.

Also, school environments can receive greater attention specifically in building campus and colleague communities. Teachers can be applauded and supported with administrative validation through trust and agency to make classroom decisions. Another commonality mentioned by all participants was the need for valid and valued advancement within the teaching profession that doesn't equate to leaving the students and classroom. Perhaps, the teaching profession could allow for a leadership apprenticeship model as an alternative pathway to part-time administrative roles that involved teacher-sharing, mentorship, and other advanced opportunities. These opportunities and positions should also come with matching compensation.

There is always room for more stories. This study had a fairly narrow scope in only highlighting four participants and their narrative accounts of the teaching experience. More voices will undoubtedly lead to more insights, discoveries, and

discussion. Additionally, the participants I worked with were solely ELA instructors. The problem of teacher attrition certainly affects English teachers, but it also affects teachers of all disciplines, as well as primary in addition to secondary teachers. The counter-stories of attrition need to continue to be collected in order to adequately portray those in the teaching field and their motivations for retention. This study also focused on teachers in the state of Arizona which has unique and difficult circumstances regarding the teaching profession. A similar study that addressed educators from a larger pool and variety of regions of the United States could yield new data and teacher perspectives. It may also provide insight into what is working in some states/ regions and isn't in others.

A longitudinal study that tracked pre-service teachers to their five-year career mark could also prove illuminating through a traction of the teachers' initial career decisions and motivations and how those factors maintained or changed through their teaching profession. These methods should continue the narrative methodology, allowing the teachers to be in control of their stories and how they view their experiences and decisions.

Concluding Thoughts

Even though the participants in this study have so far chosen to stay in the teaching field, that doesn't mean that they aren't without needs. So, what do they need? According to Amanda, teachers need social and emotional support:

> That's the thing that just has never really existed in a systematic... frame-worked way, a way that's embedded in policy and practice that we provide social emotional supports for teachers. And who needs it more than teachers? I mean

> students. Sure. But I mean that is why we're losing teachers because we don't have the social emotional supports. (Interview 2)

Ruth echoed this sentiment, "we are taught to give and give and give. But in the past few years, I've realized that I need to be satisfied as well" (Interview 2).

Callie needs opportunities for advancement. She said that's one of her main motivations for looking into a new career path, "it's just never-ending opportunity for advancement" (Interview 2). Amanda agreed with this need as well, even giving advice to a younger colleague to seek higher education opportunities that would open doors for advancement, even if he didn't see the need right now. She told me that she thought I had done it right--looking at the end game by pursuing a graduate degree that would enable opportunities for advancement while staying in the education field. That was something she just hadn't considered, and at this point in her life, doesn't see plausible. Dian just wants to be respected and allowed to continue to control her corner.

I strongly feel that these are things that can be achieved. These teachers truly are not asking for much in return for what they do. However, these teachers still have something that cannot be created by legislation and district policies: passion. Perhaps teacher education programs can heavily emphasize to pre-service teachers the importance of having the right intentions. Why do these students want to become teachers? Is it because they love their subject areas? Do they love Shakespeare? Great--become a Shakespeare literature professor. Do they love writing? Fantastic--write a book. Do they love reading? Awesome--become a book editor. Or do they love students? Do they love *teaching* students? The other passions are admirable and great appendages to a teaching

portfolio, but they cannot be the crux. The teachers who continue to teach--the *good* teachers who continue to teach--do so for their students.

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I was in church and this young fellow and young woman slid-in next to me and I recognized him as one of the students I had suspended one time. After church we talked and I said, "Very good to see you after all this time. How did you happen to know how to find me?"

He said. "I called Salt Lake City. I am here because one of my classmates passed away and I attended the funeral yesterday. I told my wife here that I can't leave Sacramento without seeing Dr. Sherwood." That kid left high school and joined the Marines. He wrote a letter to me. I had suspended him a couple times. He was a good kid, but he did some dumb things. And in that letter, he said, "Some of the officers think I would make a good officer." He said, "I have a chance to go to OTS to be trained as an officer, but I need a letter of recommendation." I wrote him a really good one. They took him into officer's training and he became a lieutenant colonel in the Marines and now he's a retired lieutenant colonel. He said, "your letter made all the difference."

I asked him, "After all these years, why did you want to look me up?"

He said, "because the way you lived, I wanted to be like you."

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I had to suspend students because of their behavior, unwillingness to cooperate. Some of them I suspended for as long as a month at a time. The fascinating thing to me is that many of these young people come back to visit me even now. I was the vice principal here at a local high school for twelve years. During that time, I had contact with a lot of people. I asked one fellow-- good kid I liked him a lot, apparently, he liked me-- I said, we had a lot of excellent teachers at that school, have you gone back to visit them? And he said no.

I said, "Why not? Why are you visiting me? The vice principal?"

"Because, the teachers wanted to get rid of me. But you wouldn't let me go."

-Grandpa Robert P. Sherwood Ph.D., teacher and administrator from 1954-1994

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview One

How did you get here?

Tell me about your earliest experiences with reading and writing.

--what stories with reading and writing do you remember?

Tell me about your earliest experiences with school/ education,

Tell me about your earliest experiences with teaching (perhaps an experience in high school?)

What are moments from your secondary schooling that stand out to you? Tell me about them.

What teachers do you remember and why, what stories do you remember?

Can you remember when you decided to become a teacher? What was that experience?

Tell me about your journey of becoming a teacher.

What is it like being you?

Tell me what an ordinary teaching day looks like for you from when you wake up to when you go to bed?

What things do you most enjoy in your classroom?

What do you most enjoy at home?

How would you describe your teaching personality and methods?

How would you explain your teaching philosophy?

Interview Two

What is it like being you? (cont.)

What students do you most connect with?

What students do you find most difficult?

What students do you most remember?

What was one of the hardest days you have ever had during your profession?

Tell me about one of the best days you have ever had.

What does it mean to be you?

How do you define the role of a teacher?

How do you fit into that role?

Where do you see yourself going in this profession?

What does this profession mean to you?

Reflecting back, what would you have done differently?

What factors do you believe have most motivated you to continue teaching?

What moments caused you to most consider leaving?

How do you define the importance of teachers and education?

What impact do you hope to leave in the wake of your teaching career?

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

James Blasingame
English
000000000
James.Blasingame@asu.edu

Dear James Blasingame:

On 12/14/2018 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification
Title:	Those Who Stay: A Case Study of Five Secondary English Teachers Who Continue to Teach; A Look into Teacher Retention
Investigator:	James Blasingame
IRB ID:	STUDY00009032
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• MPSAZper_form_062618.pdf, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Dissertation Participant Consent.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Unstructured Interview Protocol 1.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Westwood Permission-District, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • MPSAZResearchPermission.pdf, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • TEACHER JOB SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE (TJSQ) (Hughes, 2006).pdf,

	Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Unstructured Interview Protocol 2.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Westwood Permission, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Dissertation_HRP-503a.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Amanda Luszeck
Amanda Luszeck
Elizabeth Durand